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TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

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THE CLASS STRUGGLE AND ITS
PLACE IN NATIONAL UNITY

BY
KARL WALTER

WITH A MESSAGE FROM
THE RT HON GEORGE LANSBURY, M P

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DEAR KARL WALTER,

I have not been able to read your book so cannot pretend to pass judgment or opinion upon it. I can however say I am confident my friend, whom for over thirty years I have known as a lover of freedom and a supporter of all great movements on behalf of the People, will have given his time, thought and energy for one purpose only and that the only purpose in life that matters—the establishment of true unity among all the children of Man. May the day soon come when mankind will become one great Family working together for the Common Good, Each for All, All for Each.

GEORGE LANSBURY.

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TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

CHAPTER I

ORIGIN

THE pick of the working people of England, organised in their own present interest and for the future realisation of an economic democracy, have a part in the life of their country which is not always seen in true character and proportions at home, still less abroad. The relative importance of the different organisations is often mistakenly estimated, the public statements of leaders wrongly valued, the real aims and problems of the Labour Movement misunderstood. Owing, for instance, to the greater public interest which attaches to political rather than social demonstrations, the importance of the parliamentary wing of the Movement is commonly exaggerated. Especially abroad, "Labourism" is often regarded as the whole matter.

But even if this foreign appellation, so much more explicit than any we have invented ourselves, could be anglicised and made to refer to the whole Movement instead of to the parliamentary side only, it still would not designate what is vital in the Movement, which certainly is no doctrine or theory. Nor is the manifestation of the class conflict taken here in any theoretical sense, not as the flower but as the root of the matter, the common origin of the Movement and of the opposition to it.

The Labour Movement is essentially the collective effort of the working classes for the improvement of their own economic and social conditions ; and it is opposed

by the possessing classes—not unanimously, but neither is Labour unanimous in its own behalf. Political aims have always been subsidiary to this purpose, and the intention at least of all parliamentary activity has been to support and advance it.

In none of its issues has the class struggle in England been so sharply defined as on the Continent ; nor in the opposition to it has there been so much outward show of force. But that does not mean that the conflict is any less real, or that the number of its victims has been less here than elsewhere. The lethal weapon of Capitalism is not the rifle, but hunger. We shall see how effectively it was used in the early days whose grim realities must be recalled for an understanding of the origin of the struggle, its changing form, the abiding spirit of its aims, the obstacles overcome, the problems still to be faced.

More dramatically than in countries where Capitalism came less rapidly upon the scene, the economic conflict started in England with a sustained and remorseless attack by the possessing classes. The offensive began on the agricultural front ; the peasantry as a class were gradually destroyed, while ruthless pressure pursued the landless proletariat thus created. The workers were defenceless throughout the earlier phases of the process. The foundations of Capitalist wealth and power had been laid, and England had been transformed from a peasant country to a land of beggars, before there was any counter-attack.

The rapid development of industry which this process made possible earned for the period the name of Industrial Revolution. And the turnover of national occupation, from growing things to making things, was indeed enormous ; less than 5 per cent. of the population were industrially employed when it began ; in 1770 the industrial population was not much greater ; by 1811 it had left that of agriculture far behind.

But change of occupation was only the outward show of a much more profound alteration of life that was being forced upon the workers. The essence of the Industrial

Revolution was not, as we might imagine to-day, a transfer of wage-earners from one field to another, from rural to urban paymasters ; indeed, those who remained on the land were as much subject to the new slavery as those who were driven to swell the population of the growing factory towns ; essentially it was the conversion of a settled peasantry into a footloose proletariat, of workers secure in their employment to workers who must go begging for a job.

Locally the process was swift and beyond appeal ; nationally it took a century to complete, roughly from 1750 to 1850. A series of several thousand Enclosure Acts took millions of acres away from the traditional users and abolished their grazing and other rights on hitherto common land. Other measures completed the degradation of what little honour and security for Labour remained over from handicraft days. Underpayment of the labourer had been mitigated by a wages supplement paid out of the local poor fund ; the practice was discontinued, along with other outdoor relief, when the Poor Law of 1834 established the workhouse as the only refuge of the hungry. The workers had also a constitutional method for the negotiation of labour conditions in an old statute of Elizabeth, which authorised magistrates to fix wages. Its repeal was the unforeseen result of several years of parliamentary efforts by philanthropic Members to bring the laws affecting Labour up to date. During the course of this first parliamentary intervention on behalf of Labour, a Minimum Wage Bill, introduced by petition of the weavers, was rejected by Parliament in 1808.

By these measures, by repealing the old regulation of wages, abolishing the wages subsidy, and passing a Poor Law that put a new terror into unemployment, the *laissez-faire* labour policy was perfected. Other existing laws were disciplinary. Capitalism had freed itself from all legal restraint. The master could make any conditions and pay any wages he pleased. The new slavery of the workers was complete.

Lest slavery seem too strong a term, let us take an intimate glance at the conditions of some of the dispossessed ; and, as it will be our only illustration of them, let the example be that of a "benevolent proprietor" who, on the word of no less an authority than Robert Owen, his son-in-law, "spared no expense to give comfort" to his employees.

Mr. Dale built his cotton-spinning factory in Lanark near convenient water-power, but without any available labour to work it ; the Scottish peasantry of the neighbourhood disdained factory work, not having been coerced into it by an Enclosure Act. "Two modes then only remained," writes Owen, "of obtaining labourers ; the one to procure children from the workhouses and public charities, the other to induce families to settle round the works."

So 500 children between the ages of six and eight years were procured for the benevolent proprietor from the charities of Edinburgh and "apprenticed" to him for seven to nine years. At the same time homeless families were induced to settle, by building "a village" beside the factory. The new villagers were a bad lot, however ; for, writes Owen, "only persons destitute of friends, employment, and character, were found willing to try the experiment." And this resulted in "a very wretched society in the village, in which vice and immorality prevailed to an enormous extent."

"The boarding house containing the children presented a very different scene," he continues ; for the proprietor "did all that any individual could do for his fellow creatures." But, he adds, "under the best and most humane regulations, it was absolutely necessary that the children should be employed within the mills from six in the morning until seven in the evening." And as it was only after this thirteen-hour day that there could be classes for them in reading, writing and arithmetic, the educational results were disappointing. Even physically, it seemed, although their thirteen hours, "in constant employment on their feet within the cotton

mills," were less than elsewhere, the children did not benefit by the *régime*. "Many became dwarfs in body and mind, and some of them were deformed. Mr. Dale's solicitude and kind arrangements for the comfort and happiness of these children were rendered in their ultimate effect almost nugatory."

Conditions elsewhere may be inferred from this account of a benevolent experiment, written by Owen in 1818 when the factory had been in his own hands for sixteen years. "Hundreds of thousands of children of 7 to 12," he wrote a few years later, "work incessantly 15 hours a day in an overheated and unhealthy atmosphere with only 40 minutes in that time allowed for meals." Describing his own reformed system, he advocated giving all children five years of school, from the ages of five to ten, before they were "apprenticed." He asked Parliament to prohibit the employment of children under ten in factories; but he thought it necessary to support such an extravagantly humanitarian plea by the argument, that the nation could afford to try and get on without the labour of younger children because there was not likely to be any further increase in the export trade.

In his own factory Owen introduced a contributory form of health, accident, and old age insurance, the workers' premium being a one-sixtieth part of wages. He devoted all profit beyond a fixed return on capital to the welfare of the workers. Moral discipline was restored in the "wretched society" of the village, mainly by plain speaking and ethical persuasion. His reforms for the children included "military training" with "firearms of proportionate weight and size to the age and strength of the boys," and later "the more complicated military movements."

There is much more to come about Owen and his part in the first counter-attack of the workers, but it is on a wider stage than is shown by this rose-coloured glimpse of the industrial scene. Many discoveries and inventions mark the age. What made them all relevant, what set the industrial stage, was the discovery that a landless

and moneyless population could be driven by hunger and cold to produce wealth for anyone who would provide them with enough to keep soul and body together. And it was exploited with a ruthlessness that must amaze us to-day. We have had glimpses of the children. For adults in factories the normal working day was sixteen hours, often eighteen. Men, women and children worked underground twelve hours a day and seven days a week. For this they received means of subsistence compared with which the lowest unemployment subsidy to-day would have seemed princely.

Children, of course, received very much lower wages, and consequently found more ready employment, than their parents. It was not unusual in hard times for a family to be maintained by its infants, especially when the first trade depressions came after the brief post-war boom of 1815. The estimated million unemployed of that time were not children; the more fortunate thousands among them were supported by their children, whose numbers also secured advantageous relief allowances before that practice was abolished. The population figures for the years 1792 to 1817 indicate that children were regarded as an asset by their parents; there was an increase in that period from 15 to 18 millions.

The foundations of our industrial Capitalism were thus to a shocking extent accumulated out of the labour of these children, less profit coming from the employment of adults. When this great collective horror of the industrial era has been recorded, other details are superfluous. It was not restricted to England, of course, but the special strangeness of it is that such a state of affairs was tolerated at home at the very time when the voice of the English philanthropist was most loudly denouncing slavery in other countries. Possibly it is accounted for by the national peculiarity of a sympathy often responsive to the sufferings of other people while stoically enduring those of our own. Possibly the philanthropists of those days were carried away by terror of the French Revolution, or by discovery of the new Capitalist road to wealth.

Anyhow they made no protest in the early years of the attack on the workers, but indeed participated in it. Wilberforce, champion of foreign slaves, took a leading part in passing the most important measures devised to subjugate the English wage-slaves.

These measures, the Combination Acts of 1799, legalised what the courts were already doing, with or without the sanction of earlier laws, treating every primitive effort for Trade Union organisation as a criminal offence. Certain traditional rights of combination survived among the skilled craftsmen of the older towns. Many of their Trade Clubs retained some privileges—for instance, to limit the number of apprentices and to negotiate working agreements—through the worst years of repression.

The survival of craft practices and ideals, however, had more influence in a later stage of utopian ideals in the Labour Movement, than in the initiation of the struggle. The first counter-attack—which came from the persecuted miners, weavers and factory workers—was blind revolt; only later, with a growing sense of power to shape the future, did the workers begin to look back with longing to a golden age of crafts and guilds, as if proletarians also had some claim on that lost heritage of an aristocracy of labour.

The Combination Laws were not repealed until 1824, but meanwhile ideas were spreading and revolt was gathering. Radicals like Paine, and later Cobbett, spoke to the workers from a distance. The London Corresponding Society for seven years conducted an epistolary agitation addressed to them, proclaiming among other things that "property is nothing but human labour," even after the society had been suppressed in 1799. For a time the poets were more rebellious than the people. William Godwin had started the train of social idealism, based upon abstract theory, which inspired Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge, a whole generation of writers. With them, however, Godwin found some of his enthusiasm checked by the French Revolution; but

it is interesting to note that he had taken his stand with Louis Blanc, for the principle "to each according to his needs," as against that of Saint-Simon, "to each according to his deeds."

The first person to investigate and denounce the injustices of the profit-system seems to have been Charles Hall, the title of whose book, *Effects of Civilisation*, struck a note in 1805 that was amplified by Edward Carpenter, in *Civilisation : Its Cause and Cure*, a century later. Hall calculated that the working man laboured seven days for the capitalist to one for himself. He anticipated other observers by writing : "The rich and the poor, like the algebraic signs of plus and minus, are in direct opposition to and destructive of each other."

The first theorist to win popular interest was Thomas Spence. He came nearer than any other to the workers. His ideas were made known to them through the Corresponding Society. An agrarian Communist, he advocated the communal acquisition of the land by direct expropriation, having no faith in parliamentary action. He did not try to apply his doctrine to the industrial field. The Society of Spencean Philanthropists, as in later Communist fashion, had "cells" of ten persons. It was formed in 1812, two years before his death, and boldly continued for some years to spread his teaching. He prepared the way for Owen, and with him and the parliamentary Radicals shared the shaping of those ideas which in turn were to shape the thought of the Labour Movement.

But the influence which ideas have had or have to-day on the English worker and his Movement is very easily exaggerated. The English worker always has been and still is primarily concerned with his job, and only in quite secondary instance with the ideas which others have formed about it and about him ; still more remotely with social and political theories, whatever their source and however bright their promises. The ideas of those named above and many others undoubtedly reached some of the working-class leaders ; they had little to do with

the disturbances, prelude of more serious revolt, which took place in the first years of the century.

There were two kinds of disturbances. The first was a series of strikes to which the workers in various industries were driven by the desperate conditions under which they were employed, or by attempts to impose even worse conditions on them. Many of the protests were more in the nature of local riots. Some were genuine strikes with a disciplined if extempore organisation. In 1808 the cotton and wool workers of Lancashire obtained temporary relief from starvation wages by a strike successfully carried through in spite of the Combination Laws and the lack of any permanent organisation. The miners of Northumberland and Durham, in similar circumstances, were less fortunate in 1810, their leaders being arrested and the strike defeated by military intimidation. Imprisonment of the leaders also defeated a three-weeks' strike of the Scottish weavers.

The other kind of disturbance was more widespread, better organised, and more violent. The deliberate destruction of machinery by the Luddites (acting in the name of a mythical King Ludd) may seem perverse to a mechanical generation, but it was the most effective popular movement of the day. It was not inspired by any sentimental attachment to handicrafts; it was a blind protest against industrialisation, systematic sabotage on a national scale. The leaders were never known, a circumstance which contributed to the alarm it caused at last even in Whitehall. It succeeded for a time in intimidating many employers, but the compensation thus won, for wages lost by introduction of new machinery, was soon swept away when a real fear of revolution provoked the ruling classes to retaliation. In 1812 violent repressive measures were directed against every form of Labour endeavour and protest.

Repression, however, could not silence the growing misery; nor did the peace of 1815 for long alleviate it. Almost immediately thereafter came the first automatic shock to Capitalist greed. The suffering of the workers

increased. The possessing classes were forced to take their first survey of the new economy they had created ; it revealed an unprecedented and terrible state of distress. The public conscience was moved to its first charitable efforts on a Mansion House scale in this and a second wave of depression which followed in 1825.

The new feeling of solidarity born of these hardships began to find constructive expression in the subsequent years of booming trade when the workers were relieved from the fear of starvation and the horrors of repression. In this period, beginning with the better times and ending with the Chartist crisis, many Labour aspirations were born and the Movement can be seen beginning to form habits of thought and action that were to be characteristic for a century.

CHAPTER II

ELEMENTS OF REVOLT

IN spite of the repressive Combination Acts in force from 1799 to 1824, there was considerable Trade Union activity in that period on a local and even district scale. There was even an attempt to form a National Union of all trades in 1818. But whatever was done had to be secret ; combination of any kind, even for the traditional purpose of petition, was a criminal offence. As prosperity began to fill the pockets of the employers, however, in the post-war years, repression was relaxed, and widespread organisation was actually achieved before the repeal of the Acts.

With legal recognition of the elementary rights of free association, Trade Unionism came into the open as a great spontaneous popular movement. A surviving nucleus of the National Union was a combination of the Trade Clubs of London under a Metropolitan Trades Committee, from which the present London Trades Council is in direct line of descent. There were other regional associations of Unions. A national federation of cotton spinners was formed in 1829. In the same year the building trades began to promote the combination of all crafts in a single union.

In 1830 a still more ambitious project brought together a variety of unions in the National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour. With 150 affiliated Unions it shared a leading part with the Builders' Union in the agitation which prepared the workers for the first great demonstration of class solidarity in 1834. Another national body, formed in the same year out of existing political associations, the National Union of Working Classes, may be said to have carried

the first seeds of Labour's political activity and passed them on to the Chartist organisations.

Apart from the last named, which was not a Trade Union, no doctrine inspired this great impetus of organisation. It arose from a sense of common danger and the urgent need of strong means to challenge the overbearing power of the employers. On their own initiative and by themselves the workers were creating their own main arm of defence and progress, the Trade Union movement, which remains their own and uncommitted to any social theory, in spite of the impression of other ideas and the incursion of well-meaning outsiders. But the first incursions of a hundred years ago had a deep and lasting influence on the Movement. Robert Owen, on the one hand, and the parliamentarians of Reform, on the other, even at this early stage determined the poles of action between which the effort of the movement would alternate for a century.

The parliamentary incursion sought to enlist the workers' organisations in support of Reform, and later in the Chartist revolt. The Reform Act of 1832 disillusioned the workers; Chartism nearly destroyed their organisations. Owen's incursion, more brief but also disastrous, was an interlude in these events. None of his great plans succeeded, yet his ideas have been a source of inspiration for generations and are worth examining not only for their past influence but for what is still fertile in them.

Apart from his own employees and the paternal interest he took in reforms for their benefit, Owen had no contact with working-class organisations until 1829. This was after his return from America, where he had been trying to establish utopian communities, his famous Plan having alarmed his English associates. Years before that, however, he had categorically stated the principles upon which his social philosophy rested :

1. Any general character . . . may be given to any community by means which are at the command and under the control of those who have influence

2. The happiness of self . . . can only be obtained by conduct that must promote the happiness of the community.

There was no system of popular education in those days. Owen wanted one established "to train children from their earliest infancy in good habits of every description . . . afterwards rationally educated and their labour usefully directed." He held it to be the "greatest of all errors, the notion that individuals form their own characters," and declared that "every state to be well governed, ought to direct its chief attention to the formation of character."

Owen never looked to the Church to exert this moral influence, and he very soon ceased to look to the State for it, or to the statesmen. Addressing a letter to the Press in his transition period, he wrote: "The Ministers of this country—and I know them well—do not possess sufficient energies and practical knowledge to lead the public mind as it now ought to be led; and their political opponents possess still less practical knowledge." Doubt regarding the efficacy of parliamentary action for the improvement of society was not so uncommon in those times as to-day; but thousands of his followers still hold to his view, which has had a profound influence especially upon the Co-operative Movement, that the more direct road of progress for the workers is through their own social and economic organisations.

As a radical critic of the existing order of society, Owen began by addressing his fellow employers and the ruling classes; but he was just as outspoken among his own employees. In an address to the latter at the opening of an Institute for the Formation of Character, in 1819, after carefully explaining to them some of the consequences of the fact that "every individual may be trained to produce far more than he can consume," he led them to the conclusion that "all the assumed fundamental principles on which society has hitherto been founded are erroneous." Friends and fellow industrialists of his own class, scandalised by such instruction, examined with misgiving his "Plan." It

proposed to deal with unemployment by forming Co-operative villages, but they saw in it a scheme to put into practice subversive social and economic ideas, an ingenious and dangerous attack upon their wonderful new Capitalist system.

As such his doctrine was soon regarded by thousands of workers to whom it became known while he was in America making his experiments in Community Socialism. When he returned to England in 1829 he found an extensive popular movement which looked to him as its leader, a surprising national crusade of the working classes against wage-slavery and poverty. All over the country Co-operative societies had been formed, doing all manner of things, but united in the object of raising the necessary means to establish Co-operative communities. They were to be villages, self-supporting agriculturally and industrially, and in the popular mind, if not in Owen's, there was already a backward glance in these first Labour aspirations. Thousands of industrial workers were not more than a generation removed from the land; their vision of a semi-industrialised peasantry was half a memory of what seemed a golden age compared with their present conditions.

Owen now found himself drawn into a great public campaign. Many of the new Trade Unions which had sprung up after the repeal of the Combination Acts adopted the Owenite plan and set up their own workshops. Finding that they also regarded him as their leader, Owen began to make yet greater plans. He did not abandon his own class; he still and always sought their technical collaboration; but he could now address himself to thousands of enthusiastic followers, impatient to put his schemes into operation. Doubts of the workers' ability to manage their own affairs were forgotten or thrust aside; the initiative already shown by them was inspiring, and his own business success seemed to warrant his becoming their business leader.

Any man of his mind must have fallen into the trap which events thus laid for him; for his imagination was

reaching out to vast constructive possibilities such as those which have inspired later generations under the names of Communism, Socialism, Syndicalism, Co-operation; and the material under his hand was willing, eager to be used, and apparently mature. It was an opportunity for which a lifetime of social thought and experiment had prepared him. He had enunciated the theory of labour-value—that labour is the source of all value in a product—which gave Marx the basis of his doctrine. He had defined the economic policy of production-for-use, which for generations has animated Co-operative movements throughout the world and is prevailing to-day on a still wider scale in the totalitarian states and wherever the virtue of profit-capitalism is declining. And here in England, more than a hundred years ago, in the midst of the first splendour and power of the Capitalist ascendancy, what must impress us is the heroic figure of the pioneer who set himself against it, his faith in what he knew was right, his impetuous leadership that tried to overleap or circumvent all obstacles and difficulties in its brief day of power; and the range of his prophetic imagination, its action no less dramatic for being doomed to a swift and catastrophic end.

In the midst of the great Reform campaign, Owen kept his mind steadily on the revolution to be achieved without Parliament. In the very year of Reform he stood out for the direct-action principle against the radical and socialistic parliamentarians who tried to capture the Co-operative Congress of 1832. But because he told Co-operators to keep out of politics, he is not to be regarded as limited in political vision or lacking claim to be considered a political leader. In his short term of authority, his popular influence was so wide, and was so spontaneously accorded to him, as to resemble a dictatorship; and he was leading toward a very definite political objective. We should call it a Syndicalist revolution to-day. The "productive classes" were to have complete dominion over their own industry. Co-operative

Societies and Trade Unions were to undertake both agricultural and industrial production, and to distribute their produce through their own markets. A national congress, representative of all classes of producers but based upon the Trade Unions, was to direct the national business, and in due time "supersede Parliament."

Owen took various steps toward this revolutionary end with a rapid and fatal facility of organisation. In that same year of Reform, 1832, the largest Trade Union in the country, that of the builders, adopted his plan for the organisation of a great National Guild of Builders, to comprise all the building crafts and undertake collectively all kinds of construction. Its business was to be extended not only by filling its own contracts but by the withdrawal of labour from all other contractors.

The organ of the Guild put the main issue quite simply: "The question to be decided is—shall Labour or Capital be uppermost?" For some months Owen and his followers were in no doubt about the answer. The Guild comprised the whole membership of the Unions which had created it, and this they considered ample to defeat the lockout of Union men which was the employers' reply to it. Included in the work so hopefully undertaken was the building of a great Guild-hall at Birmingham.

At the same time, Owen was promoting and sometimes financing what were named, in accordance with the labour-value theory, Equitable Labour Exchanges, markets for the disposal of Co-operative and Trade Union products. Goods were paid for on delivery, at prices reckoned by labour costs, and in currency notes issued by the markets, with which other goods could be purchased. The markets had an immediate success, not limited to their members but attracting the general public. In some towns the Owenite labour currency was accepted by other traders.

The crowning scheme, encouraged by these and other successes, revealed the whole intention of the movement. Several years of propaganda by Owen up and down the

country had prepared the Unions and Co-operative Societies for some great step forward to be taken by them. When the moment for it came, however, the decision was taken hurriedly. The delegates to the conference had no mandates for such action, a detail still deplored by Owen's more constitutionally minded admirers. The national conference was held in London in October, 1833; it was called the "Trades Parliament" by its own commentators, and was vaunted by them as being more important than "the other Parliament" then also sitting; it was certainly more representative of the people, in spite of the great Reform.

To this assembly Owen proposed the formation of what he called, putting all his programme into the name: "The Grand National Moral Union of the Productive Classes of Great Britain and Ireland." The significance of this title had already faded in the minds of those who re-christened the organisation a few months later, at a second congress, The Grand National Consolidated Trade Union. Through this all-inclusive organ the profit-system and Parliament were to be supplanted by a Co-operative system of production-for-use, with producers' control of agriculture and industry and a national government controlled by the Union itself. The state as it existed, as a thing outside the life of the productive classes, was to be abolished, and a new one created by a political integration of their collective functions.

The announcement of this new organisation provoked a fever of activity among the workers, readily turning away now from their first parliamentary disillusionment, the Reform Act, to things they could do for themselves. Unions of every description hastened to enroll; hundreds of new societies were hurriedly organised for the purpose. Among the ruling classes the announcement caused something like a panic. The State's reaction was slow and blundering; that of the employers swift and effective. Among the many prosecutions resulting from the scare was the famous case of the Tolpuddle labourers,

sentenced to seven years transportation for joining one of the new agricultural Unions.

The employers throughout the country systematically began to lock out all workers connected with the National Union. The first demand upon the Union thus became to support its members in these disputes and in the sympathetic strikes to which they gave rise. The temper of the workers throughout the country was roused to fighting pitch by the opposition which their new aspirations encountered. Strikes began to take on a political colour. There were some local general strikes.

At this time, also, the General Strike as a political weapon first made its appearance. A Glasgow manifesto anticipates the symbolic image of The Man With the Folded Arms, popular in various countries at the beginning of the present century. The romantic revolutionary theory is propounded. "There will be no insurrection," declared the manifesto, "it will simply be passive resistance." By this method the swift downfall of Capitalism was promised.

The strikes and lockouts, their waste and disorder and provocation of greater violence, undermined the National Union and dismayed Owen. It may be questionable whether the Union could have survived under any leadership; it is certain that Owen was not the man to lead it to the kind of victory which might have been possible. He did not know and would not have accepted the theory of the class war, although no man saw more clearly and sympathetically the actual conflict of class interests; and he would have scorned the fable of a dictatorship of the proletariat. His own programmatic name for the Union in itself suggests that the Grand National organ of Government would have resembled rather the present Italian Chamber of Corporations than any less widely representative body, even the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, nearest living blood relation of the Grand National. For the Union to him was a pressure organisation, certainly, but something more—a "Union of the Productive Classes," and

changing its name did not alter his purpose. When he found that the Union was being led astray from that purpose, he did not hesitate; as dramatically as he had proposed its foundation, he moved its dissolution.

Owen did not follow the crowd and take up the General Strike as the great weapon of peaceful revolution, and for this he is sometimes said to have changed his purpose, or shifted his ground. Opinion has changed since 1926. Owen was about a hundred years ahead of his times in rejecting the General Strike as part of Labour's *technique militaire*. He restated that part of his purpose which had been neglected—and still is not understood by many of his admirers—in forming a National Regeneration Society. Its object was to bring the productive classes together in social and economic (and later political) collaboration, the working classes and those employers whose technical and managerial ability was required for production.

The necessity of such technical collaboration has never been denied by Trade Unionism or Syndicalism; but to admit it is another matter. The admission is still supposed to carry with it, as in Owen's day, a suggestion that some concession has been made, as if it implied an acceptance of the profit-system instead of production-for-use. But Owen was always on the side of the angels. He hated the whole system of wage-slavery as much as anyone. For him the theory, that basic wages are determined by the bare subsistence requirements of the worker, might be a horribly truthful statement of actual Capitalist conditions, but never the accepted principle of a reasonable economic system. He was a revolutionary, but not a proletarian, and proletarianism was already so much felt in those days that his insistence on the collaboration of all classes necessary to production scandalised his followers.

Other differences of opinion contributed to disputes that led to the final break between Owen and his lieutenants. His unorthodox attitude toward religion had always been for them a serious reproach against him.

His high-handed manner of dealing with those who opposed him was another. On the top of these differences, his totalitarian conception of producers' organisation brought his relations with the Union to a sharp and decisive end. His motion for its dissolution was rejected. The Union struggled on for a few months. Another delegate conference was called. From this Owen was excluded.

The workers, it might seem, were taking things into their own hands again. But that was far from being the case. Direct action had failed and, as they were so often to do in future in similar circumstances, the hopes of the Movement were turning to Parliament, forgetting already the disillusionment so recently suffered from their first association with parliamentarians.

The Radicals had taken the lead in obtaining the repeal of the Combination Laws in 1824, and for this had some claim upon the Trade Unions for support in the Reform campaign. They further promised the workers great benefits therefrom. Political enfranchisement was to go hand in hand with the economic enfranchisement which it would assist the workers to win. But the parliamentary agitation was not a working-class interest; it had its roots in earlier struggles for religious freedom; it was given fresh impulse and some class feeling by the French Revolution, and Radical ideas expanded under the influence of the popular demand for peace, a formidable movement supported by the workers toward the end of the Napoleonic wars, when Peace and Reform was the political slogan of the day. Only from this point did the Radical movement, reinforced by the Irish struggle, begin to take an interest in the rising Labour Movement, competing for its support with questions of more direct working-class interest and entirely overshadowed for a time by Owenite Syndicalism.

Working-class interest in parliamentary Reform, though it may be said to go back to the publication of *The Rights of Man*, was not actively concerned with it until the depression of 1817. The workers were suffering

from the unsuccessful strike movement of those years and the parliamentary agitation found in this situation a ready hearing. Cobbett, the great Radical leader and journalist, and Hunt, the famous orator, were chief among the many writers and speakers at whose political demonstrations the workers were able to vent a social discontent they were not allowed to express through their own organisations. At one of these demonstrations addressed by Hunt, known historically as the Peterloo Massacre, eleven persons were killed and some hundreds injured. This was an entirely pacific meeting. Elsewhere there were risings and armed strikes, especially in Scotland. All were bloodily suppressed and several of their leaders executed, among them Andrew Hardie, a forebear of Keir. The Six Acts of 1819 for a time drove the Radical agitation underground.

When it re-emerged, it was to carry Reform by means of a more effective use of the working classes. The agitation was conducted through many new clubs and societies, middle-class and working-class. Among the latter was outstanding, in 1830, The National Union of the Working Classes, primitive ancestor of the present Labour Party. The Radicals made good use of this body, pointing to its activities and those of its allied societies throughout the country, as a menace of revolution. Reform was only wrung from an obstinate Government by such threats, by local risings and riots which included the sacking of several gaols and castles. There were also demonstrations against the person of the King, to which the workers were predisposed by popular sympathy with Queen Caroline. Reform could not have been achieved without such support of the workers; and they got nothing thereby for themselves, as will be seen, but only made their situation worse.

Parliament before Reform had been a preserve of the landed gentry, among whom, however, the money-makers had been penetrating for some time, thereby saving England from having to go through a revolution like that of France. It was not necessary to kill the old

ruling class ; the new capitalists could marry into it ; they could buy land and then buy their way into Parliament to the limited extent of existing constituencies on the market. Purchase and bribery were the recognised method of election to the House of Commons, a simple method compared with that of to-day, particularly in those select constituencies where there were less than fifty voters. There were 181 constituencies with fewer than 300. The Reform Act broke up this system by a redistribution of constituencies, the creation of new ones in hitherto unrepresented areas, and an extension of the franchise to the middle classes.

Far from benefiting the workers, Reform only confirmed and extended into the political field the control exercised over them by their masters, the new industrial capitalists. The effect of this was soon felt. There was a small solatium in the Factory Act of 1833, which prohibited the employment of children under nine years old in textile factories, excepting silk mills, limited the working day of those under thirteen to nine hours, and introduced factory inspection. Then, in the following year, came the new Poor Law, with which the story of Chartism properly begins.

CHAPTER III

RISING AND FORESHADOWING

THE emotional drive of Chartism had working-class exasperation behind it; in ideas and in leadership it was a mixed class movement. Its limited political objective was to complete the parliamentary Reform of 1832. But working-class improvement was held out as an assured sequel to complete Reform.

Chartism had no revolutionary ideas or speculations of lasting interest such as those which give the Owen crusade a living contact with our own. Its policy was a medley of motives, its organisation chaotic. It was badly led, by leaders who were always quarrelling among themselves, from the first crisis taking different directions. And it accomplished nothing. Yet it is more important for our understanding of this hundred years of Labour history than any other event in the formative period. Only one seed of Owen's bagful took root in England; later cultivation of some others came from stock of continental sowing. Chartism was English through and through; it was not only a popular rising but a foreshadowing of the political character of a people.

The famous Six Points of the People's Charter of 1838 were: (1) manhood suffrage, (2) voting by ballot, (3) annual parliamentary elections, (4) abolition of property qualifications for candidates, (5) payment of members, and (6) decennial equalisation of electoral districts. The document itself was the joint work of Radicals in Parliament and one or two Labour leaders, among them Lovett of the London Working Men's Association. This body had taken the place of the National Union of the Working Classes, instrumental in the Reform campaign. It had branches in London

and was representative of a movement comprising other political clubs and societies, mainly drawn from the more skilled workers but with a certain number of lower middle-class members.

At the same time an almost identical programme was published independently in Birmingham by the Political Union of that city, also a survival from the Reform campaign, a middle-class body with a small working-class membership. The Birmingham Chartists were led by Attwood, a banker and Member of Parliament, by whom they had been persuaded to adopt as one of their demands a reform of the currency based on much the same principles as Social Credit.

But the masses of the Chartist Movement, those who gave it a passion and power far beyond the capacity of its leadership, were the discontented workers of the Northern and Midland factory districts. Here for several years was conducted a great political agitation; first mainly by the rousing oratory of two middle-class leaders, an independent parson and a Tory land agent; later by a brilliant Irish demagogue and journalist, Feargus O'Connor, former Member of Parliament and associate of Cobbett. The driving power of Chartism was evoked by them from this wretched population, goaded by hunger and a new persecution to follow any leader who could stir a breath of hope in their souls.

The new persecution was the pauperisation which came with the application of the Poor Laws of 1834, whereby the first Capitalist Parliament perfected the profit-*régime* of *laissez-faire*. A glance at the nature of this change will help to explain the exasperation of the workers and how it was possible for an ideal so remote as parliamentary democracy to stir them to action.

Under the old *régime* the poor were not regarded as a class apart; poverty was a mishap into which any man might fall and public assistance was provided locally, without degradation, whether for subsistence during unemployment or as a supplement to the wages of the underpaid employed. This charitable practice was

abolished by the Parliament in which a larger number of their employers now sat by grace of the workers' agitation for Reform. The traditional relief was withdrawn, without regard to the suffering so caused in a year of widespread unemployment, without the mitigation of any other method of assistance. The principle introduced by the new laws was that the needy were not to be assisted as individuals but maintained as a disciplined pauper class. The whole country was divided into districts, unions of parishes, in each of which was established a workhouse. A line was thus drawn between those who could earn or steal or beg enough to exist on, and those who could not; for the latter, the only escape from starvation was to take refuge in these institutions, where the discipline began with the segregation of the sexes, even of the most aged couples, and the standard of living was below that of many a prison to-day. Thousands indeed preferred starvation wages, and faced starvation itself, rather than go to the "union."

The revolt which poverty and this treatment of it aroused, was lifted out of its animal bitterness by the gospel of parliamentary democracy. Since Parliament had created these conditions, Parliament could abolish them and create better ones, and would do so if the workers themselves could vote; for they would then elect members sympathetic to their needs and aspirations. To this day the workers of England are still inspired by faith in this doctrine, implanted in the hearts of their forefathers and hallowed by their sacrifices for many years before it yielded any benefit to them. Time and again they have turned to it whenever other methods of defence and progress have failed. Time and again they have turned away disappointed.

United in this faith, the Chartists adopted the traditional method of petitioning Parliament, but prepared to support their demands by setting up a central authority in London. The Owenites had called their recent assembly a Trades Parliament; the Chartists gave theirs the title of Convention; and this echo of the French

Revolution, and of earlier English rebellion, in itself roused a large part of the movement to expect much more from the deliberations of the assembly than the other part intended.

The way of electing delegates to the Convention is familiar enough to-day in some countries; the manner of doing so emphasised the potential revolutionary nature of the Convention. Delegates could not be elected in private sessions of the constituent societies as this would have rendered them liable to prosecution for conspiracy. So the leaders decided in advance what men they wanted, and these were then nominated and elected in great open air meetings held in the principal centres. The procedure itself did much to spread and popularise the movement. The mass meetings were a foretaste of the popular suffrage they demanded, but suffrage at its best, with none but candidates guaranteed to win. The demonstrations were accompanied by a ritual of torch-light processions and were addressed by the greatest orators of an age of sensational oratory.

Signatures to the first Petition numbered 1,200,000 when it was finally ready for presentation in May, 1839. The Convention, however, did not wait to assemble for this, although its one and only mandate was to carry the Petition to Parliament. It had already met in February and its troubles had immediately begun. A constitutionalist section withdrew in the first days. There was nothing for the Convention to discuss excepting measures to be taken in the almost certain case of the Petition's rejection by Parliament. A considerable number of delegates demanded immediate adoption of an eventual policy of physical force. Some delegates were in earnest; others who were bluffing took fright at news from the provinces telling of arms being purchased and drilling taking place. The Convention would have been wrecked had it been obliged to take a decision regarding ulterior methods, and was only saved by a Cabinet crisis in May which made any parliamentary action on the Petition impossible until July.

The Convention adjourned for a new popular campaign. In effect this was a referendum on all the eventual methods of action debated by the Convention. The questions put to the mass meetings implied that the Convention did intend to issue orders when the time came ; the multitudes were invited to pledge themselves to obey. Specifically, to obey, if ordered, for instance : to refuse to pay taxes, to promote financial panic and a run on the banks, to conduct a General Strike for the period of one month, to arm and fight for the privileges won by their ancestors. The high importance which the ideal of parliamentary democracy already held in the public mind is indicated by the violence of the means proposed to secure the foundations of it. But the most violent means, to arm and fight, it is to be noted, were invoked for a defensive purpose, for the defence of something precious that was actually in danger, the privilege which the people were exercising, the right of public meeting. This was forthwith challenged by the Government when the Convention reassembled in July in Birmingham. A public meeting in that city was broken up by a special body of police sent from London. Lovett and a local leader were arrested when they headed a protest.

The Convention did nothing about this. Leaving the effect of it to spread indignation through the country, the assembly removed to London to be ready for the debate on the Petition in Parliament.

The Petition was rejected in July, 1839, by 235 votes against 46. The Convention now had to act on its popular mandate. By a two to one majority the delegates decided to call a General Strike, a " national holiday " of one month. Of all the measures discussed, none could have been more untimely. The Trade Unions had not recovered from their recent disaster ; unemployment had reduced the physical resistance of the workers ; the Convention itself had no resources whatever to support a General Strike. Possibly it was hoped by some of the leaders that the strike would precipitate a revolutionary

situation which local reports may have described. In any case the Convention quickly discovered that a mistake had been made. A week later, on the proposal of its previous movers, the Strike resolution was rescinded, only six delegates voting for its retention. Then the Convention appointed a committee, and dissolved in recriminations.

That was the end of the great Convention, but not of the Chartist Movement, any more than a dissolution of the Parliamentary Party marks the end of the Labour Movement. The leaders quarrelled and separated in anger, but a people united does not so easily fall apart. The agitation continued locally in a gallant spirit of spontaneous rather than organised solidarity. In South Wales there was an armed rising of serious proportions; there were smaller ones elsewhere, all easily quelled. There was enough to show what might have been done had the national leaders been united and prepared to move on from their parliamentary objective to a revolutionary one. But there was no revolutionary situation, no plan for the insurrection. As in Italy in somewhat similar circumstances fifty-eight years later, the leaders who had not led were sent to prison. The Chartist crusade seemed to have vanished as swiftly as that of Owen.

But already in that same year, 1840, the new wave was forming. During his imprisonment O'Connor still retained influence among the workers through his newspaper, and directed the growth of a new body, the National Charter Association. In Birmingham the Political Union had been frightened out of existence; but Sturge, another banker, took Attwood's place and launched the Complete Suffrage Movement in 1841, not indeed to revive the Charter with its now unsavoury association with rising labourers, but to win its main demands constitutionally. The aid of Bright and the Anti-Corn Law League, already agitating for repeal, was welcomed and reciprocated.

This political connection did not disconcert the

original Chartists. When Sturge called a Suffrage Conference, in 1842, the old leaders attended in force, Lovett and others from London, and representatives of other sections into which the old movement had broken. They imposed the Six Points on the meeting and wrote them into its new Petition. Not satisfied with this, when the Conference resumed a few months later they brought O'Connor into it, and with his reinforcements carried the original Charter. The Birmingham Petition obtained 67 votes in Parliament, a combination of Chartist supporters and Free Traders.

Meanwhile O'Connor and his associates had prepared a third Petition for which they claimed more than three million signatures. The Convention which assembled to support it was less contentious but no more effective than the first. The O'Connor Petition obtained 49 votes.

By this time working-class interest in Chartism, apart from O'Connor's personal following, was beginning to wane, although many held it responsible for the widespread and violent strikes of that year. Bands of strikers marched through many of the Northern districts to enforce a cessation of work, often removing the plugs from factory boilers in order to do so, from which the rising became known as the Plug Plot. The disturbances were demonstrably due to economic causes, but were given a political colour by the Chartist leaders. Their resolutions, declaring that the strikes would be maintained until the Charter was accepted by Parliament, were passed at all the strike meetings which they invaded. Then hunger and a show of military force drove the workers back to the factories. Their local leaders were arrested by the score, together with most of the leading Chartists.

Once more the Chartist Movement seemed to have been killed, and once more it rose again, this time almost entirely by the demagogic genius of O'Connor. He gave it a new turn, evidently realising that parliamentary democracy had lost its hold on the public imagination. Through his great newspaper *The Northern Star*, he

launched a plan for land settlement, a re-hash of some of Owen's plans without any of his principles. In this phase his genius falls to the level of a Bottomley and anticipates some of the tricks of the Yellow Press, especially its statistical habits. According to O'Connor, the Petition he presented to Parliament in 1848 had nearly six million signatures; according to the officials who received it, less than two million. His paper estimated the mob which gathered on that occasion in South London at 250,000; *The Times*, at 20,000. Other reports declared that the number of special constables enrolled to control this demonstration was greater than the number of demonstrators. Both the impulse and the faith of the earlier effort were lacking. O'Connor had won a seat in Parliament in 1847; the workers had to wait twenty years for Disraeli to give them their first instalment of political democracy.

The Chartist demonstration of 1848 was England's only contribution to the revolutionary events of that year. Thenceforward every effort to revive the agitation, or to gain Trade Union support for it, was vain. But the Chartist Association was kept alive until 1858, and in its years of decline produced a new development of some significance.

In the provinces, among the workers, Chartism was in those years a fading symbol of political revolt. In London it retained some glamour, as a revolutionary movement can when nursed by intellectuals, even without any popular roots. Its leaders had previously maintained cordial but casual relations with foreign revolutionary movements; its new leader, Ernest Jones, trained for the diplomatic service, gathered these contacts together into a special kind of internationalism. He made the outstanding work of Chartism in its last days the establishment of a centre for political refugees, thus founding a tradition of succour and loyalty to lost causes which humanitarian movements in London have since maintained.

Londoners can look back without pride to the dis-

tinguished company of refugees entertained in those years, including Mazzini and Garibaldi. It was memorable stage-management, too, which enrolled Louis Napoleon as a special constable to suppress that abortive Chartist demonstration which Marx had helped to prepare. A German Communist Society had been founded in London in 1840. Marx took an active part with Jones, after the 1848 fiasco, in trying to keep the Chartist movement alive as the English section of that international movement for which the Communist Manifesto had called in 1847.

But our internationalism has never been Marxist, and only since the War strategic. Jones christened the Chartist agency he set up, The International Welcome and Protest Committee, and later generations without much discrimination continued to welcome those who came, and protest against those who drove them, to our shores. Then the international policy of Labour ventured further, trying to be constructive, seeking collective security, but without strategic aims, universal. After the War the welcoming and protesting were resumed on a different scale; welcoming no longer only individuals but masses; protesting not merely against single oppressors but against whole nations of them; and the unhappy refugee mentality spread, creating out of its reports a peculiar kind of insularity, a sad sort of internationalism, ready to protest against the wickedness of any country except our own.

CHAPTER IV

THE CAPITALIST PEACE

AFTER the storms of Owenism and Chartism the social surface of England remains comparatively calm for a long generation. It is an interesting and at first sight a mysterious period. The process of degradation, the transformation of peasantry to proletariat, is accelerated by the extension of the railways. Something like a million persons are recruited into a new class of pauperism instituted by the Poor Law of 1834. Another new class, only a shade above them, the unskilled and unorganised workers of the "sweated industries," becomes definable and remains defenceless until the end of the century. Various continental *régimes* are being attacked by revolutionary plots, often directed from London, where English Labour leaders take the initiative in forming the first International and putting Marx in command. Yet throughout these stirring times, and in spite of continuous pressure on the most submerged classes, there is no large scale disturbance of the industrial peace at home.

The explanation is that although it was an imposed peace, its conditions were mitigated for the great majority of the workers by national prosperity and rising wages. This made progress possible for them in a new kind of Trade Unionism and a specific form of Co-operation, the two movements separating now but on foundations so securely laid that they have lasted to this day. The employers, on the other hand, were also combining more efficiently. The main disputes of the period are extensive lockouts aimed at the restriction or destruction of the new Unions, in most cases successfully resisted.

There was no cessation of working-class resistance,

but the lull in the open conflict was definite and prolonged. Observation of its coincidence with the *Pan Britannica* may have prompted the Marxian declaration that "in proportion as the antagonism within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will cease." May it be so ! In fact, the causation here was contrariwise. Industrial peace at home was due to the exploitation of opportunities which foreign peace made possible.

The *laissez-faire* terms of wage-slavery were modified in later Chartist days by the Factory Act of 1844, and a Ten Hours Act of 1847. The Public Health Act of 1848 acknowledged the need of setting some limit to the exploitation of women and children. And at last among the ruling classes humanitarian feelings revived and began to produce in some quarters a revulsion against the accepted gospel of profit.

Humanitarianism alone might not have been able to modify the conflict, but the material situation of the industrial capitalists was changing. They were in such an advantageous position abroad that they could well afford to relax the pressure on their servants at home. In the first phase of industrialism they had been working under great financial difficulties; fresh capital for business expansion often had to be squeezed out of the individual business itself; that is, out of the workers. Then the capitalist situation became easier. In 1844 the Bank Charter Act, and later the extension of joint stock companies and the limited liability law, provided a new basis for business expansion. Public investment found capital for the railways and the new industries of mining and engineering which now rapidly caught up with textiles.

The middle generation of the century was a period of almost unchecked trade expansion, increasing profits, a stationary or decreasing cost of living, better wages, a rising standard of life—not for all the workers, but for the growing skilled and semi-skilled industrial classes. The agricultural workers, unorganised and morally

depleted by the exodus to the new towns and railways, did not share in this improvement, although the farmers flourished under Free Trade. The repeal of the Corn Laws (1846) unexpectedly proved beneficial to them as well as to industry, helping them to convert their husbandry to meet profitably the growing food requirements of the towns. But their profits went into the new industries, either directly or through the landlords.

In these expansive days, thrift became the great Victorian virtue, in economic importance second only to the discovery of Capitalist exploitation of the landless. Thrift became also a new measure of progress among those of the working classes who had a sufficient share in the growing wealth to practise it. Savings and investment are the new characteristic of their organisations. They began to save money for future personal needs, but also for the financing of future engagements in the class conflict. English Labour thrift still has that double purpose to-day, and must have so long as a duel of starvation remains the most cherished method of combat.

The great strikes of the preceding period had failed primarily not for want of solidarity but for lack of reserves. But now the accumulation of reserves by the Trade Unions brought a necessary modification of policy, for the reserves were no longer pledged only to fighting purposes. Where there is money there is moderation. The French syndicates still make their campaigns with little baggage, and can afford to risk all in a strike; the Italian syndicates have their place in the State and are responsible organs for individual security as well as economic pressure. The English Unions ninety years ago began to show a variation away from lightly organised militancy in this other direction. The new Unions and amalgamations adopted a dual policy combining social insurance with industrial resistance.

The moderate Unions gradually came under the influence of a London group of Trade Union leaders. The members of this group, sometimes called the Junta,

were somewhat incongruously at the same time close associates of the revolutionary protagonists of Communism. The Charter Association was their centre until 1858; the London Trades Council was founded by them in 1860; and in 1864 they convened the meeting at which (after Marx had liquidated Owenite and Mazzinian influence) the First International was founded. For some years these moderate English leaders were on the executive.

But if their domestic policy was moderation itself, their behaviour had the Marxian touch. They made it their business "to watch over the general interests of labour, political and social, both in and out of Parliament," as required by the constitution of the London Trades Council. They also obtained a wide control over Trade Union action in labour disputes, virtually dictating what measure of support, if any, should be given by other Unions to a Union involved in a strike or lockout. As leaders themselves of the wealthier Unions, this gave them great power. It was evidently convenient for a Union, striving to accumulate reserves of its own, to be relieved of the responsibility for such decisions in this way.

Another moderate Labour body with constructive aims but less popular influence, was the National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour. After an ambitious effort to bring all the Trade Unions together in 1845, it had fostered an attempted Owenite revival which was swept away in the political excitement of Chartism. In 1859 it secured the passing of a Molestation of Workmen Act, a measure which for the first time brought strikes within legal definition, recognising also the right of the workers to support a strike by peaceful picketing, though leaving them liable to prosecution under other Acts. The Association lingered on until 1860, when it sponsored another innovation, the intervention of the State to promote an agreed settlement in Labour disputes. This was authorised in a Conciliation Act of the same year, which in other pro-

visions also encouraged the making of collective agreements. The spirit of Owen, surviving for a time in this National Association, had dwindled in purpose from class collaboration in production-for-use to conciliation of interests in production-for-profit.

The formation of national Unions now became general. One or two had survived the collapse of the Grand National in 1834, notably those of the stonemasons and carpenters, and that of the boilermakers which had been founded in that year. Among the textile workers and potters there were also survivals. These had been the pioneers; the lead was now taken in the rapidly growing trades of mining and engineering. The first National Association of miners was founded in 1841; the district Unions composing it were attacked with the greatest severity, especially where intervention of the Chartists made an excuse for ruthless lockouts and persecution. Years of armed terrorism in Wales suppressed Unionism there for a time. Elsewhere local Unions survived. The National Association was dissolved in 1848. The engineers were more successful. Joint action was secured between the London Unions and the new engineering Unions of the North, and in 1851 the Amalgamated Society of Engineers was formed around an earlier nucleus and took in most of the Unions in the industry.

Model for many future amalgamations, the Engineers' Society was typical of the new development of this period, the combination of the two functions of social providence and economic pressure. Benefits were on a wide scale, including strike and unemployment pay, health, old age, and funeral subsidies. But the membership dues necessary to provide such services were more than most workers could pay, a shilling a week, more than 10 per cent. of the weekly wage of less skilled workers, for instance, in textiles. So the new policy of thrift and foresight in Trade Unionism in effect created an upper class of Unions, above those of the lower paid workers, which were less firmly established but more militant.

And below them was always the unorganised and defenceless class of workers, and below them again the paupers.

On the other side, the employers also were organising on national lines, to resist a movement which they were beginning to fear. The engineering employers deliberately prepared to smash the new Amalgamated Society. A national lockout in the year following its formation, 1852, lasted for three months. When work was resumed it was on the same terms as before, the workers having been obliged to sign individually a formal but soon-forgotten renunciation of membership. In this struggle the Christian Socialists took an active part with moral and material aid to the workers.

Similar tactics were used by the employers in an attempt to break another national development of Unionism, that of the cotton-spinners. This was an even more highly organised lockout, with mobilisation of blacklegs protected by the law and arrest of the men's leaders. But the spinners also maintained their national organisation.

The different constitutions of these two national bodies of the engineers and the spinners illustrate two varieties of national organisation. The engineering Unions, on coming into amalgamation, surrendered their autonomy and became branches of the National Society, with a central administration for benefits and a central authority for defence. The textile workers, on the other hand, weavers as well as spinners, adopted a federal structure, the federated Unions retaining their local administration of benefit funds, but accepting a central authority for defence. There were some interesting occupational differences: apprenticeship was a jealously guarded province of the engineers, but was not applicable in textiles; and the engineers were vigorously opposing the introduction of piece-work, already general in the cotton trades.

An entirely different method for combining the forces of separate Unions was adopted in the building trades,

that of the Joint Committee. The builders also had to face various lockouts in this period, otherwise combined action was rarely undertaken by the craft Unions, though militant enough singly on their own behalf. An exception was a strike of all crafts in Manchester in 1858 which won the Saturday half-holiday.

The builders frequently figure as pioneers in Labour history, and one of their fights of this period was important, the London building lockout of 1859. The workers resisted firmly for many months under a popular leader, George Potter, as secretary of their Joint Committee. The engineers had been helped by the builders in 1852 and now came to the builders' assistance with a contribution of £3,000 to their funds. A standing committee of the other London Unions was formed to organise help, and a minor incident in the struggle was the formation of a building guild which provided employment for its group of workers until the end of the lockout. The fight showed the importance of local organisation, stimulating the growth of Trades Councils, and it set a new standard for inter-Union solidarity.

Following this successful resistance, Potter persuaded the London Joint Committee to give a national lead to the builders for a reduction of working hours. A national association was formed next year, 1860, but before anything more could be done employers countered by abolishing payment by the day and substituting payment by the hour, thereby frustrating for a time the demand for a shorter day.

A few years later Potter's leadership of another campaign rather unexpectedly eventuates in a restoration of unity to the Trade Union Movement such as it had not known since the high days of Owen. The first gesture, however, was a challenge to the dictatorial power which the Junta of the London Trades Council now wielded through the big amalgamated societies. Other Trades Councils were extending their influence; a national conference had been called by the Glasgow Council. A number of the Councils had much the same standing in

their districts as that of the Chambers of Labour in Italy many years later. But the political position of London gave that Council a great strategic advantage.

The occasion and cause of the national challenge to London authority was the summoning of a conference of the amalgamated societies by the London Council, in 1867, to prepare evidence for a Royal Commission on Trade Unions. Potter had previously organised the London Working Men's Association, which had the support of the more militant Unions and of other Trades Councils, some 600,000 workers being represented at its national conference that year. This Association now nominated a rival Committee, protesting that the Junta had no right or mandate to speak for the whole Trade Union movement.

The national struggle for Trade Union leadership thus undertaken led to the decisive event in the history of the Movement, its unification. The moderates had the assistance of many middle-class sympathisers, including the Christian Socialists, and were in a stronger and better position to influence and assist the Royal Commission. Potter and his associates fought in a loyal spirit. When they found that the Junta's proposals, for legalising the position of the Trade Unions in labour disputes and protecting their funds, were acceptable in themselves, they withdrew their protest and tried at once to repair the division of the Movement which was its greatest weakness.

The first step toward this end was taken at the national conference summoned by the Manchester Trades Council in 1868. The London Council and the Amalgamated Societies were not represented, but it was their policy which was adopted. Consequently, in 1871, the Amalgamated Societies also joined the national conference, by then established as an annual Congress, and accepted it as the central authority of the Movement. After sixty-eight years the constitution of this authority still remains substantially the same in the Trades Union Congress of to-day.

The Movement thus achieved unity. The benefit of the legislation obtained in the course of doing so at once proved illusory. The Trades Union Act of 1871 gave what for many years seemed sufficient legal protection for the Unions themselves, but another measure passed at the same time as a Criminal Law Amendment Act rendered illegal even the normal activities of their members in labour disputes. Individual strikers became liable to prosecution for the most innocent form of participation. During a single strike in the following year 500 summonses were issued, twenty-four of the men were sent to prison for six weeks, and their leaders were sentenced to a year's detention.

The employers scored in two ways by this legislation : it not only penalised the workers but it diverted their attention from industrial organisation, which was becoming formidable, to parliamentary action, which could not be so for many years to come. Need of more favourable laws made it seem necessary, and an extension of the franchise in 1867 had at last brought direct participation in parliamentary activities within the scope of the artisan classes. But much was to happen in the Movement before there was any effective concentration on parliamentary opportunities. The call to that new field of the class struggle had no part in the unification. Protection of their funds had been secured, and that was the most urgent objective of the Unions, especially the great amalgamated societies.

Thrift was the keynote of the period. There was no difficulty about the protection of savings for investment and insurance purposes, but the demand that funds for the fighting of industrial disputes also should be safeguarded by the law was always open to challenge and led the Trade Unions into a secondary struggle which had to be renewed again and again. For the time being, the matter had been settled, but the employers had done their worst to render the settlement ineffective. By lockouts and every other means they had sought to destroy the Unions ; and now, instead of assisting the

Unions to find the right protection and the serviceable position which they were seeking in the new Capitalist order, the employers put every difficulty in the way. They were by now, presumably, so conscious of having abused the workers that they were afraid of them.

Distrust of Trade Unionism has always been perverse or ridiculous. In those days nothing could have been clearer than the willingness of the workers to enter the Capitalist system individually and collectively. Thousands of workers were now small capitalists themselves. Thrift was being promoted by many other working-class organisations besides the Trade Unions. The Friendly Society, adapted to all kinds of mutual aid, rose rapidly from its traditional humble position to a place of high importance in social economy. In this period were laid the foundations of the big benefit societies which hold a large share of the collective savings of the workers and greatly add to their social security to-day. Building societies to facilitate the purchase of a home on easy terms also became popular. There was a widespread development of savings banks, not Co-operative as in Germany and Italy, although Co-operation was making such strides at home, but small Capitalist enterprises which re-invested through the ordinary banks or in a special account opened by the Government for their encouragement.

To all these forms of mutual aid and friendly societies legislative protection was given, and provision made for registration, in 1846. When these provisions were extended, in 1875, thirteen distinct types of societies were recognised. Of leading importance among them by this time were the consumers' Co-operative societies, most ingenious of all forms of Victorian thrift and most clearly indicative of the worker's willingness to become an active partner in a Capitalist system—on his own terms.

CHAPTER V

CHRISTIAN SOCIALISTS AND CO-OPERATORS

THE first formal use of the designation Socialist in England was, characteristically enough, with a qualification modifying its antithesis to individualism. Even unqualified, however, Socialism has never had for us the definitive meaning it has on the Continent. "We are all Socialists now," an Archbishop said some years ago, and in that sense the word is most generally used, to designate all manner of social, economic and political activities which are beneficial primarily to the working classes, consequently to the whole community. Thus a great deal that has been achieved in these fields in Italy in the name of Fascism, we should in approval call Socialism. In a narrower sense the opponents of Socialism, here as elsewhere, use the word in depreciation. When the Conservatives call the Labour Party "the Socialist Party," it is with that intention.

The definition of Socialism given in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* is: "The principle that individual freedom should be completely subordinate to the interests of the community." In reference to English Socialism this is misleading; the profession of Socialism in England has always been distinguished by a different approach to the problem of the perfectibility of the individual-community relationship. We prefer "personal salvation by service to the community," rather than "community salvation by subordination of the individual."

The Christian Socialists gave Socialism in England this character, and so gave Socialism a bad name for the authors of the Communist Manifesto, moving them in fear of its association with religiosity and utopianism, as Engels has told, to call their doctrine Communism instead of Socialism.

There was no Socialism in this early Victorian England, according to Engels. An old Chartist leader, Cooper, looking back to those days in 1870 and lamenting their lack of revolutionary spirit, writes about "well-dressed working-men talking of Co-operative Stores and their shares in them, or in building societies"; and he finds it all "more painful than I can tell." Perhaps both these commentators made so little account of the great constructive work that was going on in the Labour Movement of those days for the same reason—because Labour was taking no part in politics. The workers had turned away from the parliamentary ambitions of Chartism, and that movement was in a dying phase of preoccupation with foreign affairs not unlike that of parliamentary Labour in its worst decline. They were turning again to Owen's ideas, which called for no parliamentary activity, and were so remote from State Socialism as to furnish indeed the antidote. Co-operation, not such a dull thing as the old Chartist found it, had already taken root and was fast growing into a movement that by nature and by recent declaration is opposed to State Socialism, perhaps the most formidable barrier to it in England.

Because Owenism and Chartism were the collectivist and democratic expressions of the day, they are sometimes regarded as the parents of English Socialism, and in one respect they are complementary: Owenism was everything but parliamentary and Chartism was nothing else. But in fact they never did ideologically come together. The most fertile seed of Owenism took root in the midst of Chartism with complete disregard of its aims. The first English movement to call itself Socialist, also contemporaneous, was critical of Chartism. Charles Kingsley has recorded in a memorable sentence the "bitter disappointment" of the Christian Socialists with the Charter: "The French cry of Organisation of Labour is worth a thousand of it!"

They were middle-class Victorian Christians, but not therefore either bourgeois or passive, those first English

Socialists who could look to the France of 1848 for inspiration over the heads of their own parliamentary demagogues. A comparatively small company in their most active period, they never at any time constituted a popular party or proclaimed a political dogma. Yet their influence on their own times was profound, and has been the guiding inspiration of many Socialists who came after them. Keir Hardie, a world apart from them in other ways, acknowledged his spiritual brotherhood with them; Edward Carpenter, poet of the Labour Movement, though his later spiritual adventures were not bounded by any creed, served his Socialist novitiate as a curate of their leader, F. D. Maurice; and to-day the one remaining great figure of Labour's heroic age is the veteran Christian Socialist, George Lansbury.

The Christian Socialists agreed with Mazzini in deploring its materialism as the worst feature of continental Socialism. They naturally hoped to convert to Christianity all that was pagan in the English social movements. But, on the other hand, like many sectarian antecedents, Anabaptists, Diggers, Familists, Levellers, Fifth Monarchy Men, they wanted to convert Christianity into a social force for the creation of a better society. More directly it was the voice of Coleridge, inspired by the infidel Godwin, which roused them to observe how the once adventurous and romantic impulse to acquire wealth had led to an idealisation of profiteering in which there was nothing romantic or adventurous. They noted also that the rise of material prosperity had been a period of religious decline; and to account for this they did not, like most of their class, blame the natural wickedness and impiety of the lower orders, but the greed of Capitalism. How peculiar this opinion must have sounded in Victorian drawing-rooms one may judge by comparing it with that of the great and good Lord Shaftesbury, pioneer of factory reform, for whom the sources of all evil were Chartism and Socialism, "the two great demons in morals and politics—conspiracies against God and good order."

But the Christian Socialists were no drawing-room reformers; they went to the people. Their main activities were among the people, promoting and encouraging every kind of economic and social organisation, assisting the workers in labour disputes, making their case known where otherwise it was only caricatured, helping the cause of Labour in every way, financially, morally, politically. The Christian conscience was roused by them in the Church as well as in the more sympathetic Chapel. The famous Tolpuddle Union had been formed on clerical initiative; the revival of agricultural labour organisation nearly forty years later was led by a labouring Methodist preacher. The formation of Working Men's Clubs and Institutes, spreading all over the country in the '60s and '70s, was started and led by a reverend philanthropist. And from Christian example also sprang later the "settlement movement"—that is, the settlement of middle-class persons in working-class districts to devote themselves to welfare work and a direct comprehension of the life and problems of the workers, a movement which has so far been the most fruitful of all the moderating influences on the class conflict.

The main contribution of the Christian Socialists, however, was toward the sound establishment of the Co-operative Movement. Their service to it had three distinct forms: the securing of legislation, the organisation of societies, and the revival of national conferences. To them were largely due the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts of 1852, 1855 and 1862, basis of the present legal status of Co-operation. Their promotion of societies was less enduring; the type of organisation favoured by them was the producing society, still characteristic of the Italian movement but represented in England by only one or two survivals. On the other hand, their revival of national conferences was the decisive step in the establishment of the new movement. Since 1850 the Annual Congress has steadily grown in representative scope and authority, the Co-operative

equivalent of the Annual Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party Conference.

As is well known, the impetus of the movement came from the workers themselves. Popular initiative, seizing upon Owen's ideas during his absence in America, had shaken the paternalism out of them and filled them with the breath of popular life; and now again, in 1844, it was popular initiative that converted one of his ideas into an economic process and a distinctive social movement.

With what steady and simple devotion the Rochdale Pioneers pursued the one clear road along which experience led them day by day, can only be appreciated by a glance over the tremendous line of country they originally purposed to travel. Here is the chart of it, as bravely drawn as any of those picturesque maps by which mediæval mariners set forth to conquer an unexplored world :

The establishment of a store for the sale of provisions clothing etc., the building purchasing or erecting of a number of houses in which the members desiring to assist one another in improving their domestic and social conditions may reside, the manufacture of such articles as the society may determine upon to provide employment for such members who may be without employment or who may be suffering in consequence of repeated reductions in their wages, the purchasing or renting of an estate or estates of land which shall be cultivated by members who may be out of employment or whose labour may be badly remunerated; and further that as soon as practicable this society shall proceed to arrange the powers of production and distribution, education and government, or in other words to establish a self-supporting home colony of united interests or assist other societies in establishing such colonies.

Out of this medley of Owenite ideas, the Rochdale Pioneers, taking first things first, developed a technique of Co-operative distribution later adopted by Co-operators in every country of the world. Theirs may not have been the first society to pay the characteristic dividend on purchases, but it was the first to stick to that principle

and develop it beyond retail trading, applying it to wholesale business with retail societies as members of the wholesale society. Also, after various failures due to allowing ordinary Capitalist participation in the promotion of manufactures, they and their associated societies invented consumer-production, under which all productive enterprise is owned and controlled by the consumers.

Hitherto Trade Unions and Co-operative societies had been intimately linked in aims and often in organisation. With definition of function came a natural divergence of growth, leading to a division in the Labour Movement which is also to some extent ideological. The story of Co-operation may be completed at once; for it does not impinge upon the future narrative, but should be kept in mind as a constantly expanding background of Labour events, and a factor of great social and economic importance in the evolution of a better society.

The story is one of uninterrupted progress, from hundreds of little local groups like that of Rochdale to a national movement which to-day has a membership mounting to ten millions, about double that of Trade Unions and nearly four times that of the Labour Party. The steadiness of its business progress and the steadfastness of its policy within the limits of the first item of the Rochdale agenda have been not less remarkable. Taken as a single distributive and manufacturing enterprise the Co-operative business far exceeds any other in the world in trade and resources, investments in land and buildings, factories and warehouses, transportation, colonial and foreign estates, its own bank funds and reserves in other banks and Government securities. The accumulation of this vast collective wealth has been accomplished mainly by small share subscriptions and the re-investment of purchase-dividends, later combined with ordinary credit methods of expansion.

Increase of business is the natural aim, social and commercial, of every society; increase of business means increase of membership. But critics are not lacking in

the movement itself to complain that its great material success has been made at the cost of much compromise. Co-operation, they say, has never challenged Capitalism, excepting as one capitalist challenges another. The movement has never taken full advantage of the moral power it might use in competition with the private trader. Competition has been subtle rather than downright, and in quality rather than in price. There has been no price-cutting, in fact, such as that by which the Italian movement caters for the poorest classes and qualifies as a criterion for the control of prices. As among the Trade Unions, the desire to be all-inclusive is there and will be achieved in time ; but responsibility for great wealth breeds reluctance in its employment for any but the most secure ends, and catering for the very poor has proved to be highly speculative wherever the English societies have tried it.

Such matters of business policy are questions for the business managers, but are not outside the control of the members. Every retail society is an autonomous democratic unit, the wholesale society is owned by the retail societies, and the movement as a whole has its own social organ, the Co-operative Union, which derives authority from the Annual Congress of delegates of societies. By this means there is the possibility of continuous adjustment between the necessary profit-policy of the business directors and whatever social policy may be desired by the members.

It is not to be expected, however, that ten million members will all be enthusiastic Co-operators, or England would be transformed. Even with good leadership it is difficult to rouse such a mass, recruited from all classes and joining often for trivial motives. And this is especially the case in societies where membership has outgrown the physical possibility of a general meeting of members. There is nevertheless a Co-operatively devoted and socially active nucleus in most societies, fostered by the education secretaries and maintained by innumerable clubs for various social and educational purposes. Among

the latter, notably, the Women's Guild, a national federation, although politically erratic, exercises a moral and usually progressive influence in the movement independent of the Co-operative authorities, the more hierarchical Union and the business magnates of the Wholesale.

The Co-operative society as an employer comes into a natural conflict of interests with the Trade Unions. At one time the resistance of the societies to the Union organisation of their workers was as strong as that of any Capitalist employer. Until 1911 the Co-operative Union refused to insert a Trade Union wage clause in its model rules for societies; and labour disputes are still common. The Co-operative shop assistants have their own union, with nearly 200,000 members; factory, transport, and other workers find membership in twenty-one different unions. For conciliation purposes, however, all Co-operative workers are in corporate relations through their Union branches for representation on a national board, on which sit also representatives of their employers, the societies. Reference of disputes to this joint board is by agreement compulsory; pending settlement, strikes and lockouts are prohibited. There is no statutory ground for the negotiations, however; they have no legally binding contract to deal with; and there is no time limit to the proceedings. So it is only too easy for obstructionism to defeat this attempt to devise a more civilised method than force for the settlement of disputes, even in the Co-operative world.

Problems of this nature, however, seldom reach the great Co-operative fellowship, and then only at the Annual Congress overshadowed by other interests. And to the natural inertia of such a large membership was added in 1917 the distraction of sectarian parliamentary representation, which has since drawn freely upon the energy and intelligence of the movement without any notable reward. The formation of a Co-operative Party divided and confused Co-operative opinion. After twenty-two years the Party still remains a small and

ambiguous venture for such a great movement, not officially affiliated with the Labour Party, but affording a kind of tradesmen's entrance to Labour politics. In a functional or professional Parliament, Co-operation would have to be represented; in a regional assembly such representation is anomalous.

Internationally, also, political cross-currents have been allowed to interfere with Co-operative unity, and a conciliatory influence which might have been expected from the mother movement has been lacking. The International Co-operative Alliance itself, founded in 1895, has not been in a position since the War to show the high courage necessary for a resolute internationalism.

Estimates of the moral strength and ideological independence of the Co-operative movement are not easily made. There is a strong core of social purpose in the national movement as well as in many individual societies, which saves it from its own materialism and the alien idealism of its parliamentarians. Its own leaders maintain that it has a distinctive mission. A return of the Co-operative spirit in place of a sectarian outlook, regulation of the corporate relations between members and workers, extension of the movement to the poorest classes, clarification of the economic theory of consumer-production—these would seem to be the main opportunities for the Co-operative movement to take the pioneer position which should be its own in a solution of economic class problems.

For the present, as suggested, Co-operation remains more a background than a main figure in the field of conflict—yet by sheer weight of wealth and numbers a great supporting and stabilising force in the Labour movement; anti-Capitalist, but anti-Communist; expanding by profit-capital methods, but wholly and deeply pledged to production-for-use as against production-for-profit; pledged also—too deeply, it seems sometimes, for instance, as English farmer and Colonial planter—to consumer-production, regardless of the proletarian depths to which its dogmatic pursuit would

carry us ; but ready unquestionably to stand shoulder to shoulder with organised producers whenever Trade Unionism finds a social formula for production and service in the very wide fields outside the functional possibilities of Co-operation.

CHAPTER VI

TOWARD PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

THE narrative left the main stream of events in 1867, the year Disraeli took the next step after the Reform of 1832 toward parliamentary democracy; and this extension of the franchise leads us to a new endeavour in the Labour Movement, whose history is now coloured by the hopes of party politics.

Among the causes of this orientation of the movement, the attractiveness of the political ideal itself must be considered, as well as the course of events which provoked the parliamentary action of Labour and, finally, the emergence of a separate Labour Party.

The aspiration toward parliamentary democracy, excited in the working-class mind by the Chartist agitations, was deep-rooted. In essence when Labour knocked at the door of Parliament it was with a desire that is an innate or even originaive impulse of society, the desire to transcend the violence of internal dissension. The Owenites' translation of utopianism into the realities of Anarchist Syndicalism had revealed the inherent violence of the class conflict when pursued by direct action. The workers, turning away from that, jumped at the first opportunity to carry the issue above the plane of their physical suffering to a plane in which words would take the place of deeds, elections that of strikes. The Chartists were by no means the first, or last, to invoke violence for the purpose of winning means to abolish violence.

Parliament attracted the workers for many reasons; two were outstanding. First, their voice would ring more loudly and to more effect in that national assembly whose decisions now oppressed them; second, though

Labour disputes would not be avoided, the larger issues could be settled without violence and starvation, meeting their masters, one elected man with another, in that secluded place where the ruling classes settled their own controversies in comfort and high state.

In these two aspects, as a forum and as a tribunal for the conciliation of class interests, Parliament won and still holds the imagination of the people. In its best parliamentary days, Labour made the House of Commons the megaphone of every working-class cry for social justice. And after twenty years of the parliamentary *régime* on a complete popular basis, although parliamentary democracy is still imperfect and the present machinery overloaded, Parliament still has this unique virtue. Elsewhere a story of hidden facts, an expression of dissident opinion, is apt to go unheard by the nation, overlooked in the deep and narrow channels dissent has worn. Without formal censorship, national and local authorities and vested interests have considerable powers of suppression, not to mention occasional silences, as it were, of universal embarrassment. The popular press may be libertine in many respects, but politically is obedient to its proprietors and on occasion to the Government; and on matters of fact as well as opinion every voice can be silenced by an order or by the passing word of any one of a score of judges. Mainly therefore we cherish the institution of parliamentary democracy, in spite of its present imperfections, because it provides this uniquely efficacious forum of free speech, and because, having no great and inspiring conviction about any one truth, we want to hear, and be sure that all may hear, all things that may be true.

But it was rather the more material consideration, the advantages of Parliament for reconciling class interests, that appealed to the Trade Unions in the conciliatory days after 1867. As much in disdainful triumph over the Liberals as in solicitation of working-class support for the Conservatives, Disraeli had flung the workers a handful of votes, enfranchising the prosperous artisans

of the towns. The London Working Men's Association immediately started a campaign in preparation for the next elections. An appeal was addressed to all Trade Unions, Trades Councils, and Co-operative Societies, to establish a national election fund. But this first attempt to form a Labour Party broke down at once. The moderates, the London Trades Council and the big amalgamated Unions, would have nothing to do with it. They nevertheless ran three candidates of their own, the only working-class candidates in the elections of 1868.

In the following year the same Congress which endorsed the moderate policy of the amalgamated Unions passed a resolution in favour of Labour representation in Parliament, and the 1870 Congress endorsed the formation of a Labour Representation League.

The moderates now took control. Their association with Communism did not lead them into any adventurous course. Under their guidance the League avoided even the appearance of forming a new party. Bargaining with the Liberals wherever these most needed the support of the new working-class electorate, the League managed to impose the acceptance of a number of working-class candidates upon the Liberal Party. In its higher strategy the League had the privilege of a very eminent Liberal adviser. John Stuart Mill recommended the League, if his own party would not make the desired concessions to Labour, "to permit Tories to be sent into the House" by turning the Labour vote against Liberal candidates.

The stratagem was so well employed in the elections of 1874 that the Liberals were put out of office. The Labour Representation League ran fifteen candidates, of whom two (both miners' representatives) were elected; of course, as Liberals. They were joined by a third working-class Member of Parliament in 1880, the secretary of the League. Then, as Chartism had expired, and as the agricultural workers' movement was to expire five years later, with the election of its leader to Parliament the League dissolved.

Meanwhile once again Disraeli and the Conservatives

conceded what the workers had vainly demanded from a Liberal Government. The most objectionable labour laws were repealed and new legislation, in 1874, confirmed the legal status of the Unions and assured them a freedom of activity in labour disputes which was not challenged for a quarter of a century.

Nevertheless the Trade Unions continued their traffic with the Liberals, drawing the Congress into an ever closer association with the *laissez-faire* party. For ten years or so there was an informal popular front. Then, in 1886, a Labour Electoral Committee was named to work alongside the existing Parliamentary Committee, instructed to secure the nomination of Trade Unionists as parliamentary candidates of the Liberal Party. This official popular front of the Trades Union Congress and the Liberal Party went unbroken until the end of the century, in the case of the miners lasting several years longer, until 1909.

The commitment of Labour's parliamentary fortunes to the party of the industrial capitalists, curious culmination for the policy of leaders associated with Marx, was all the more strange in that it was effected precisely in the years when the doctrine of the class war was at last being offered to the English workers. Such an anomalous event was only made possible by unusual conditions.

Conciliation was in the air. Appeasement. Providence. *Laissez-faire*. The Trade Unions' fight for a legal status, and Labour's first participation in parliamentary activity, came in spacious years, at the height of England's privileged career in the new Capitalist world. Profits were so great that employers were generous enough about wage claims. The Trade Unions did not unduly press their demand for a share of prosperity, but behaved in the industrial field as accommodately as in the political one. The Trades Union Congress itself sponsored the Arbitration Act of 1872, and if this was an ineffective measure it was mainly because the Unions themselves went ahead of it in their own arrangements for conciliation. Every Union of importance either took

the initiative or willingly concurred in the creation of conciliation machinery.

The workers plainly showed their desire to abolish the industrial duel, the strike, the ordeal by starvation. With good will on the employers' side, not merely parliamentary collaboration but a sound and permanent basis for the peaceful regulation of relations in industry might well have been established in those days.

The employers lacked the good will; many of them still hoped to destroy the Unions. Their organisations also grew in number and strength during this period. The willingness of the Unions to adopt conciliation machinery was regarded as a sign of weakness on their part.

But if the employers were stupid, the Radicals, the close political friends of Labour, were much more to blame for what followed. The Radicals had taught the Trade Unions to believe in a Providence that watches over the prosperity of England, and in that faith the workers had been led to think they might well link their wage rates with the profitable prices their employers were sure of getting forever. Trade Union faith in *laissez-faire* was so strong at this time that the Unions joined with their teachers and masters in opposing "State interference" with labour conditions.

Conversion to Providence and *laissez-faire* had come on the very eve of calamity. In particular the workers had to pay a terrible price for making labour a mere item in the profit-process, and they have not yet wholly succeeded in redeeming it from that degradation. To all those Unions which had accepted, or on their own initiative secured, a sliding scale of wages based upon the market price of their product, the depression of the late '70s was devastating.

The workers had not the remotest control of industry, and the employers had committed their own possible guidance of it to Providence. Prices fell rapidly, carrying wages down with them, carrying them down so low that sliding-scales were repudiated right and left; and with

them went many of the Unions that had invented or accepted them. Desperate strikes, particularly in the textile industry, failed; naturally; the employers were glad to go on short time. Unemployment in the Trade Unions in 1879 rose to 11 per cent. Most of the ground won by the moderate policy of the Unions in a generation was lost in a year. The revived National Union of the miners was demolished, that of the railwaymen reduced to impotence. The backward agricultural workers had been brought into line at the peak of prosperity, their National Union leaping from nothing to a membership of 100,000 in one year, only to be reduced to little more than an election committee.

In this first serious shock to British commerce and the English capitalist, ending his enjoyment of world domination and turning his attention to the possibilities of economic imperialism, the Labour leaders in desperation still clung to their Radical friends. They did not realise how much the Liberal doctrine had been their undoing. There was nothing to discredit the Liberal alliance. Failure in the industrial field only strengthened the resolution of the Unions to pursue their new parliamentary activities; and in this course they were further encouraged in 1884 by another step toward parliamentary democracy, extending the franchise to the miners and agricultural workers.

The depression passed; commerce adjusted itself to the new conditions; for a time British trade was able to profit by the expansion of its competitors. With a return of prosperity came a renewal of Trade Union activity, and although the old leaders clung to their moderate policy there were new leaders and new ideas in the revival. In a year or two practically all the Unions had freed themselves from the sliding scale. Demands for a living wage, a minimum wage, a recognised standard of living for the workers, began to herald a redeeming conception of Labour, not as a mere item in the profit-process but the primary consideration in the production of wealth. Some of the new leaders also began to show

an understanding of the fatal relation between higher wages and the cost of living, and to regard other improvements as of more enduring value. The Trades Union Congress of 1883, against its official leaders, adopted a resolution in favour of a legal maximum eight-hours day, showing how fast the Movement was travelling away from the *laissez-faire* faith of its Liberal associates.

Showing also the fluid condition of Trade Union opinion at this time, was the manner in which Congress dealt with the first proposals for land nationalisation. The Congress of 1882 registered a vote in favour of it. Next year the resolution was decisively reversed by the Congress. But whether this first flirtation with nationalisation can be regarded as the beginning of Socialist influence on the Unions is doubtful. Opinion had been greatly stirred by the arrest of Henry George on a visit from America, and he was mistakenly reckoned an advocate of land nationalisation. In any case the Liberal-Labour alliance was still firmly maintained.

The Congress did not give any lead for a break with the Liberal Party until 1899, seventeen years after that first hint of Socialistic influence. In those years, while the various kinds of Socialist bodies to be described later were attacking or wooing the Trade Unions, finally driving them from one equivocal alliance to another, the Trade Unions themselves were changing. The alteration was necessary to meet the challenge in the industrial field. Once again the more militant type of Union began to thrive, began to take an important place in the Movement in the boom years of the '90s. For Unionism was spreading now among the unskilled, so could not fail to be more militant; the ill-paid workers had more to fight for, less to lose; they could not afford contributions to build up great funds for provident purposes, but they could provide enough to pay an organiser and put something by for the days of direct action for which they were preparing.

During the last fifteen years of the century the Trade Unions rose from wreckage to become a great movement

with two million members, four times more than at the beginning of that period, a movement confident in the solidity of the old Unions and animated by the militancy of the new ones. During that period, also, the Socialists began to have some influence, the Movement stubbornly resisting, quietly trying to evolve its own doctrine. And then with the new century suddenly, from an unexpected quarter, came a blow that altered the course of Trade Union history. A decision of the Courts in a case arising out of a strike on a little Welsh railway, by holding a Trade Union liable for all business losses due to cessation of work, virtually abolished the right to strike.

The Taff Vale judgment cost the railwaymen £50,000 and had a decisive effect upon the political policy of the Movement. Parliament, hitherto a secondary consideration, now became the one open field of urgent action. What the Socialists had been vainly trying to do for twenty years, the Taff Vale judgment accomplished in a few words, driving the Unions willy-nilly to carry the conflict up to the higher parliamentary plane, to sever at last the Liberal connection, to accept an alliance with the Socialists and, finally, support a Labour Party under their leadership.

CHAPTER VII

SEARCH FOR A LABOUR DOCTRINE

SOME ultimate aim, some social theory, the reader may think, should be discernible at this half-way point in tracing the development of Labour activities and institutions.

If a distinctive doctrine is to be discovered in the Labour Movement, which has never formulated one or adopted any social theory for its own, the search must be by observation, and without assuming the inevitability of any particular doctrine, to-day or to-morrow. We have reached the point where the Trade Unions ceased to regard the free-fight arena of Liberalism as the ideal ground upon which to meet their opponents. Elsewhere on the continent there is a great change in the character of the conflict at this point. But in England it was not coloured by any fatalistic dogma of class war, except in the minds of a very small minority. Elsewhere it became an aim of the Labour struggle to vindicate this or that theory; in England its aim remained very much what it was in the beginning: to secure through their own institutions a better life for the working-classes.

The doctrine of the Movement, then, can only be discerned as a pattern being woven out of the diversity of their interests by the main elements of the Movement, by the Co-operators, upholding against Socialism a Liberal philosophy but not Liberal Capitalism, by the Trade Unions, the main body of the Movement, and later by the Party dependent upon them. Into this pattern now runs the strand of the Socialist invasion of the Unions.

The only ideological commitment of the Unions, once freed from the Liberal connection, was to a parliamentary

régime. The immunity of their leaders to the personal influence of Marx in earlier days has been noted. Neither they nor the Movement reflected his teaching. Only in the next generation, thirty-three years after the Communist Manifesto, Marx being still in London and consulted, was his doctrine introduced into English political life. Even then it was done surreptitiously, as Marx felt with some reason, not being named at all, the only acknowledgment being to "a greater thinker and original writer."

This was in a little book with an attractive title, *England for All*, by H. M. Hyndman, a wealthy acquaintance of Marx. He was a man of real social enthusiasm, the mould of many Social Democrats as we came to know them, ready at any time and anywhere to assume the dictatorship of the proletariat or any part of it. He was himself always dictator in the Social Democratic Federation which he founded in 1881. Its policy was at first a moderate programme designed to capture and federate the working-class Radical clubs, little more than the old Chartist demands plus land nationalisation. This failed, however, and the Federation ran up the red flag of romantic revolution in 1883, inviting rebels of every shade to enlist.

Hyndman did his best to make the movement English by linking Social Democracy to the tradition of Owen and Spence and the Chartists, but it was a foreign idea and it was presented in a language too doctrinaire for the English temperament. Moreover, Hyndman and his followers entirely failed at first to find their way to the people. They were so remote from the realities of the class conflict that they went about denouncing the Trade Unions while preaching the class war, just at a time when the Unions were preparing for a great industrial struggle.

Contempt for all organisations except his own, and Hyndman's insistence upon parliamentary activity as a necessary pursuit of Socialism, split the Federation in 1884. The cleavage was on the same lines as those on which the International, then already eight years dead,

had divided in 1872. Among the Anarchist dissenters, the Federation lost its most distinguished member, William Morris, poet, painter, and craftsman. The Socialist League which he founded soon went to pieces, only a few small Anarchist groups surviving until 1914.

The Federation itself would quickly have followed the International like a ghostly shadow but for a timely change of policy. Its failure in the 1885 elections had been ignominious. One of three candidates, John Burns, got 600 votes; the others did not get a hundred between them. So the Social Democrats sought a better field of agitation, and found it among the unemployed, whose numbers were again up to 10 per cent. of Trade Union membership. It was in the course of this agitation that Hyndman shocked the class to which he belonged by saying he would like to see a rich man immolated on every pauper's grave. His emotion was provoked by revelations of misery among the unemployed, which moved also H. H. Champion, his Christian lieutenant, to say even more savagely that if the propertied class had but one throat he would cut it without a second thought.

Such sayings and the smashing of a few West End club windows made a sensation and even created an impression of revolutionary ferment. Actually there was little strength behind the demonstrations. An Irish meeting in Trafalgar Square in 1887 was made an occasion for defying the police and soldiers sent to prevent it; a considerable number of injured, and the arrest of S.D.F. leaders on "Bloody Sunday" and other occasions, added to their repute as agitators. But that was as far as they ever went. Champion confessed that the romantic revolution they were preaching was impossible "unless they had better weapons or the positive assurance that the soldiers would refuse to obey their officers."

The Social Democrats took an active part in other disturbances of these years. The most memorable action of the period was the great dock strike of 1889, led by Ben Tillett, Tom Mann, and John Burns, which won

"the dockers' tanner." Public sympathy for the dockers was shown by subscriptions of nearly £50,000 to their funds. Successful strikes in this and other unorganised occupations gave a great impetus to Trade Unionism, membership actually doubling in that year. But it was not a solid growth; much of it was quickly lost; nor did the Social Democrats who were looking for political advantage get any.

John Burns, after passing through a phase of political independence, finally took office in a Liberal Government, from which he resigned on conscientious grounds at the beginning of the War. The Marxist gospel of the S.D.F. went no deeper in the Labour Movement than in Burns. The Federation survived for some years. It was one of the three Socialist societies which combined with the Trades Union Congress in 1899 to form the Labour Representation Committee, later the Labour Party. But in the following year the Federation withdrew from the Committee because the latter would not accept the class-war doctrine. In 1911 the Federation merged with other Socialist groups in forming the British Socialist Party.

The Fabian Society was founded in 1883, as a purely intellectual body, to influence other parties rather than start one of its own. Its membership, always small, was mainly Liberal at first, but the Socialists presently succeeded in making the main purpose of the Society to become the directing brain of the Labour Movement. Their policy is indicated by the Society's motto: "For the right moment you must wait, as Fabius did most patiently when warring against Hannibal, though many censured his delays; but when the time comes you must strike hard, as Fabius did, or your waiting will be in vain and fruitless."

More true to the historical character of Fabius than to that with which its motto endowed him, the Fabian Society never did strike hard. Its leaders were brilliant opportunists; they saw that the error in the romantic formula of revolution was its time schedule; but they

either ignored or disliked too much for themselves the revolutionary association with the people which was necessary if opportunism was to preserve the will and acquire the force to strike hard. Their leading personality, George Bernard Shaw, joined them in 1884. He was temperamentally revolutionary, but more likely to frighten than lead the simple English worker. Sidney Webb, who joined a year later, was not so far removed from proletarian mentality, but was temperamentally below zero. Shaw at eighty still understands revolution wherever he sees it; Webb, also, in documents with whose nomenclature he is familiar.

While Shaw drew them to Fabian Soirée and classroom, it was Mr. and Mrs. Webb who impressed upon recruits the studious nature and practical purpose of Fabianism. The Society was always non-Marxian, if not anti-Marxian; but there is an interesting similarity between Webb's outlook and that of Marx in 1843. In that year the latter had written: "When the proletariat desires the negation of private property, it is merely elevating as a general principle of society what it already involuntarily embodies in itself as the negative product of society." In one of the famous Essays, *evangel*s of the Fabian faith, Webb wrote: "The Socialist philosophy of to-day is but the conscious and explicit assertion of principles of social organisation which have been already in great part unconsciously adopted."

In that spirit of research, seeking the Socialism in our midst, the Fabians undertook to follow the great example of the Webbs, who showed them how to make Labour the subject of historical literature and the documentation of contemporary progress the basis of a new propaganda. Fabian investigations aided in the social legislation of the day; their publications reached a thoughtful middle-class public, preparing it for the opportunity to come. They made municipal politics a training ground for politicians, and raised local issues, especially the public ownership of gas and water and other town services, to a higher significance under the name of Municipal

Socialism. For a time, also, the Fabians partly realised their aim to become the brain of the Labour Movement, through personal influence on the Independent Labour Party. They drafted the constitution of the Labour Party and educated the first Labour politicians to lead it. Some of the prominent statesmen of to-day in the other parties also took their first political steps in the Fabian nursery.

Unlike all the other Socialist societies, the Independent Labour Party was working-class in origin and democratic in character. From the beginning it had close personal relations with the Trade Unions, and without ever becoming doctrinaire like the S.D.F. it maintained a nucleus of consistent political opinion for nearly half a century. Much of this is accountable to the leadership and character of its founder, Keir Hardie. His was such an engaging personality that he would convert you simply by talking to you as if you were born in the faith ; moreover, he remained through all his successes and disappointments a simple and loyal comrade of his fellow-workers, idealist and born leader of idealists, but with moments of real political insight.

While other working-class candidates, including those of the S.D.F., were taking all the favours and money they could get from Liberals and in some cases from Conservatives, Hardie stood independently against nominees of both parties. He was not elected then, in 1888, but he polled well, and his example encouraged a similar ambition in others. In many English as well as Scottish constituencies independent Labour electoral associations were formed. In the general elections of 1892, Hardie and two other Labour Independents were elected.

In that same year the proposal for independent Labour representation came within measurable distance of a majority at the Trades Union Congress, although the Liberal Trade Unionist candidates had been more successful, twelve of them being returned. Hardie thereupon called the supporters of independence together, and at a national conference in the following year the

Independent Labour Party was formed, comprising his own little Scottish party and most of the independent local associations of England. The Social Democrats came to the conference, but they wanted to call the new party the Socialist Party and when this was rejected they remained outside the new body.

Caution in naming the new party was necessary. Socialism would have alienated the Trade Unions from the beginning, and Labour independence was more important in Hardie's eyes than any doctrine. If, by nursing the political infant discreetly, the Trades Union Congress might be got in due course to adopt it, well and good; there was no disguise about its character. But while the Socialism of the I.L.P. developed, the Trades Union opposition to Socialism stiffened. The Trades Councils as local bodies were much more open to Socialist influence than the national Unions; in 1894 they were excluded from the Trades Union Congress on the ground that there was a duplication of representation. It was also to the disadvantage of the Socialists when the Congress presently adopted a system of voting according to the number of members represented by delegates, instead of every delegate having an equal voice.

A wholesale conversion of the Trade Unions to Socialism was out of the question. Some compromise was necessary. Hardie would have none over the Socialism of the I.L.P. He had a better plan. An alliance of the Trade Unions with the Socialist societies would equally well serve his immediate purpose, the freeing of the Trade Unions from their political entanglements. Especially he wanted to see them break away from their dependence upon the Liberal Party. He felt all the more strongly about this after he had seen for himself as a Member of Parliament how the strength of the workers was demoralised by that association with the representatives of their economic masters.

But in 1894 even the modified aim of a Labour alliance seemed remote. Hardie's Independents had put up twenty-eight candidates in the general elections of that

year without a single success ; their leader lost his own seat. Nine Trade Unionist candidates were elected as Liberals. And there were internal obstacles. Several of the larger Unions, especially the Miners' Federation, already levied a contribution from their members for parliamentary purposes. It was unlikely that these Unions would allow the Congress to vote the general levy which Hardie year after year demanded for a united and independent parliamentary effort. But at last the Congress moved, in 1899, although the most it could then be persuaded to do was to allow its representatives to meet those of the Socialist parties in a joint committee.

The Labour Representation Committee was unfortunate in its first effort. The elections of the following year were dominated by the jingoism of the Boer War. With all the moral support of the Committee only two out of fifteen independent Labour candidates, one being Hardie, were returned to Parliament. Eighteen Trade Unionists were elected as Liberals.

Then a series of outside and chance events unexpectedly transformed the temporary Committee into a permanent Party.

First, in 1901, came the fateful decision in the Taff Vale case which, as already noted, profoundly changed the Labour outlook. Under its influence the main point of Hardie's objective, the independent representation of Labour, was quickly established. The Committee became a permanent body, with Ramsay MacDonald as secretary, only the Miners' Federation refusing to take part in it. The Congress also agreed in principle to a parliamentary levy, which was applied in the following year on a small scale, and in 1904 on a scale that assured the Committee an annual income of £12,000.

But this crowning success for the policy of parliamentary independence was not all. By a curious chance, more independence was won than was intended ; instead of requiring additional control over a political party which it was now financing, the Congress went in the opposite direction. It happened that resolutions censuring

Hardie's fellow Member of Parliament were to be moved in the Congress, and it happened that that Member was himself Chairman of the Congress. He spared his own feelings by ruling those resolutions out of order, together with all other motions dealing with the Labour Representation Committee. An attempt was made in the following year to regain the control of its political offshoot which Congress had thus accidentally surrendered. It took the extreme form of a proposal to adopt what was now in all but name the Labour Party, as a Trade Union Party, excluding the Socialist societies from it. This was defeated. Control thus definitely passed from the Congress to the Party. The majority power rested with the Trade Unions affiliated to the Party, but these were only a minority of the Congress.

Finally, under pressure of another outside event, the Osborne judgment, the Miners' Federation completed the parliamentary independence of Labour by joining the Party in 1909. Even so, two years later less than half the Trade Unionists were supporting the Party. Comprising the affiliated Unions and Socialist societies, its membership in 1911 was 1,539,000, that of the Trade Unions being 3,139,000; and in the peak year of both organisations, 1920, there was a similar difference.

Hardie never intended to create a Party which would exploit or divide the Trade Unions, but one which would consolidate and serve them. The demands of the new Party were in harmony with the recognised needs and desires of the whole Movement and appropriate to the political mood of the day. The Liberals were so well off after the 1906 elections that they could afford to give Labour a fair share of the fruits of parliamentary collaboration in its new form. The jingoism of the Boer War had been succeeded by a wave of national repentance and reform, with the "pro-Boer" Lloyd George riding into office on the crest of it. The Labour Party won twenty-nine seats that year, while the Miners' Federation separately took fourteen, and the Liberal-Labourites twelve.

But the ambiguous character of the Party constitution left it open to attack from both sides. In the Trades Union Congress of 1907 a renewed attempt to regain direct control by the Unions was defeated by only a bare majority. On the other hand, so little Socialist in fact was the Party that the return of a plainly labelled Socialist to Parliament at a by-election in 1908 caused a national sensation and led to the formation of a plainly labelled Socialist Party, not to collaborate with but to challenge the Labour Party.

The British Socialist Party drew together all the elements of discontent with the moderation of the Labour Party. Along with the lonely parliamentary Socialist adventurer, Victor Grayson, and what remained of the S.D.F., its main strength was a considerable number of lively Socialist groups, a separate movement created by the outstanding personality of the new combination, Robert Blatchford. He was a patriotic ex-soldier and brilliant journalist, whose keen and entertaining weekly, *The Clarion*, had built up a Socialist movement all its own, militant, patriotic, very English, a kind of National Socialism. Born thirty years later Blatchford might well have been England's Hitler or Mussolini, if England had any use for such people.

This upstart movement was absorbed during the War by the Labour Party. And so might it always have dealt with later pretenders, instead of becoming exclusive, had the Party maintained its original close relations of person and purpose with the Trade Unions. Secure in its pride of Labour legitimacy, by the extension of those relations to the whole intricate structure of Trade Unionism and to the steadily growing millions of the Co-operative Movement, out of this catholicity of contact and experience to evolve a doctrine native and proper to England, acceptable to the entire working classes, and at last triumphantly applied to the national life by authority of its parliamentary majority—that was the original and high destiny of the Labour Party in the eyes of its early supporters,

CHAPTER VIII

ALTERNATIVES OF THE LEFT

THE formation of the Labour Party gave full scope to the Movement for trying its fortunes alternatively by parliamentary and by direct action. The two contrasting tendencies fathered by Cobbett and Owen became acute in an age mentally conditioned to antithesis. The extreme of open-mindedness was to admit that there are two sides to a question—just two—and two ways of doing a thing. The universe was arranged so, from God-and-the-Devil down to the Two-Party System—and nobody expected the Labour Movement to upset the latter, by whichever of the former it might be instigated. So Labour now fell naturally into the neo-Manichean heresy, though much too vigorous as yet to fall into the low negative state of being merely anti-this or anti-that to which it later declined. The Movement was divided by very positive opinions, so strongly felt and expressed that the pre-War years became memorable for their social controversies.

The division roughly followed familiar lines, those which had divided the Co-operative Congress in 1832 and split the First International in 1872 and the Social Democratic Federation in 1884, which were now dividing most of the movements of Europe, nowhere with a clearer break than between Italian Socialists and Syndicalists in 1907. The constitution and temperament of the British Movement did not allow a split. The division was more in the nature of a polarization of energy. Henceforward, each in turn prevailing, as if under some invisible control, the energy of the Movement turns from one pole to the other.

The pendulum-like nature of Labour activities in those

years is recorded in the alternating prominence of strikes and elections. The election years are: 1906, 1910, 1918, 1922-3-4, 1929. The peak years of strikes are: 1908, 1912, 1921, 1926. The War is thus overpassed by this alternating impulse of Labour energy, driving to separate disaster in both fields. It is unlikely that any doctrinal concentration would have saved it, but there was an alignment of opinion on the two sides such as to suggest that, but for the interruption of the War, there might have been an ideological crisis, a clarification of aims, possibly a unification of forces.

Before there could be any return to direct action in the new century, however, amending legislation was required to safeguard the Trade Unions. The Taff Vale judgment had made them liable for all business losses due to their withdrawal of labour, imperilling their funds in any strike. The Trade Disputes Act of 1906 was quickly conceded to the new Party by the victorious Liberals. The Act restored the strike as a weapon to be used with civil impunity. It was one of many social measures of those years. The clever Welsh Radical, Lloyd George, was managing Campbell-Bannerman's Government as skilfully as the clever Jewish Radical, Disraeli, managed the Conservatives in his day. Labour pressure was freely exercised, and was not unwelcome, as long as the Liberal majority remained large enough to be independent of Labour support.

A measure of outstanding importance in this Parliament was the first allocation of a sum of money (£200,000) for provision of work for the unemployed. This was of special significance for the Socialists. For some years they had been demanding recognition of national responsibility for the unemployed. A first step in that direction had been taken by a Conservative measure of 1905. The principle once admitted, the Socialists claimed for every unemployed citizen the right of adequately paid work or equivalent compensation at the expense of the State. The money vote encouraged them in this interpretation.

Two years later the question became acute. In 1906 unemployment was not severe, but in 1908 it rose to 8 per cent. of Trade Union membership, with the usual increase of strikes and lockouts that came with bad times. A Royal Commission on the Poor Law had been appointed; the pauper class was being abolished and relief put on a humane basis of assistance for needy individuals. The Socialists demanded that unemployment should be dealt with in this category, on the ground that a worker without work is essentially a person needing public assistance, and that the proper relief for an unemployed man is employment.

On the other hand, it was natural that the Trade Unions should regard a cash subsidy as the normal relief for unemployment, since that was already an established practice in all Unions whose members could afford it. The practice was recognised in the social insurance schemes of 1911, under which the established services of the Unions were to be utilised by the State. Labour Party discipline broke between opinions so well founded on both sides, some members voting for the unemployment insurance scheme and some against it. The crisis that shattered the Party twenty years later was over the working of this scheme, when the same Socialist leaders who had divided against it walked out of the Party, a notable exception being George Lansbury. In 1911 he was the leading advocate of employment as against relief, and still is, although the notion of "work for all" is to-day more associated with national service and totalitarianism than with the Labour Party.

Another Liberal measure of great social importance was the Trade Boards Act of 1909. The Conciliation Act of 1867 had made Government intervention in labour-employer relations permissible; the new Act specifically required it. While Poor Law reform abolished the pauper class created in 1834, this new measure for the first time made provision for that helpless intermediary class which we noted as definable soon after that date above the paupers but below the level of workers

capable of organising in their own defence. Agitation on behalf of this submerged class had been conducted for some years in vain until, in 1906, a Sweated Industries Exhibition roused the public conscience, revealing in a manner which could not be ignored working conditions little better than those of the first brutal period of unbridled Capitalism.

The Act of 1909 applied only to occupations in which wages were "exceptionally low"; but in 1918 its provisions were extended to all branches of industry where effective machinery for the regulation of wages is lacking.

To-day there are forty-seven Trade Boards operating in forty-one branches of industry in which about one-and-a-quarter million workers are employed. Each Board consists of an equal number of representatives of employers and workers, with three members appointed by the Ministry of Labour, one of whom is chairman. When confirmed by the Minister, the agreement of a Board becomes legally binding upon all employers and workers in that branch of industry, differing in this respect from agreements negotiated by Trade Unions, which have no standing in law and are not always all-inclusive. The Trade Boards agreements in these particulars are similar to Italian collective contracts; but the latter are negotiated without official intervention, while the proceedings of a Trade Board may in effect at any moment be converted from negotiation to compulsory arbitration by the intervention of the official members, whose votes at any time could be decisive. In practice, however, apprehension of this in itself appears to keep both sides in a conciliatory mood, and the method is less dictatorial than it might seem. The Boards are officially related through a special department of the Ministry of Labour, and on the two contestant sides through special committees of the Trades Union Congress and the National Confederation of Employers' Organisations.

Throughout the passing of these and other social measures, close collaboration of the Labour Party with

the Liberals continued. Besides providing insurance and the merciful protection of Trade Boards, there were Acts to permit the feeding of necessitous schoolchildren, for medical inspection in the schools, a Housing and Town Planning Act, a Workmen's Compensation Act, an Old Age Pensions Act, a Coal Mines (Eight Hours) Act long demanded by the miners, and later, after a national strike, a Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Act. The compensation required from the Labour Party in support of Lloyd George's Budgets and Asquith's Irish policy was willingly given and well rewarded.

But in the midst of this generous flow of concessions from a Liberal Government, the supreme judges of the land delivered another unexpected decision against the Trade Unions, this time calculated to paralyse their parliamentary activity. The case at first seemed trivial; the application of a Mr. Osborne, an unimportant branch secretary of the Railwaymen, to restrain his Union from using its funds for parliamentary purposes, was refused. But Mr. Osborne had plenty of backing; the higher courts were more sympathetic; and toward the end of 1909 the final Osborne judgment denied the right of Trade Unions to use their funds in this way.

Fortunately for its existence, the blow fell at a time when the Labour Party had a full treasury; for hard upon this judgment came two general elections in quick succession. The judgment, as already noted, had one beneficial result to the Party, in driving the Miners' Federation to join it in order to consolidate Labour's threatened position.

With this great accession of strength and widespread Liberal collaboration in the constituencies, the Labour Party managed to increase its representation successively to forty, and then to forty-two. Yet the Party found itself in a less favourable position than before. The great Liberal majority had shrunk to nothing, and pressure on a Government which now depended upon Labour support had to be exercised with discretion. Labour could not risk bringing the Conservatives into

office before legislation to offset the Osborne judgment had been obtained. Great political controversies intervened. Not until 1913 was a new Trade Unions Act passed; it authorised the Unions to form special political funds, to which, however, no member should be obliged to contribute who made formal objection to doing so. Meanwhile the payment of salaries to Members of Parliament, introduced in 1911, had considerably eased matters for the Party.

The patience of the Unions in waiting four years for the restoration of their parliamentary liberties was remarkable, and suggests that they may have been more concerned about other matters. And in fact they were greatly preoccupied with direct action, now reaching hitherto unknown proportions and pretensions. The Miners' strike of 1912 involved over a million workers and was the greatest strike yet known in England. It gave 1912, the culminating year of that strike sequence, the pre-War high record of nearly 40 million working days lost in strikes and lockouts, about four times that of the preceding peak year, 1908.

The years preceding the War were indeed as remarkable for demonstrations of direct action as for social legislation, for industrial disputes as for great parliamentary struggles. The dock workers in 1911 renewed the fight that had languished since their first success in 1889. A section of the railwaymen ceased work in sympathy with them; this led to a national railway strike; and such a demonstration of solidarity gave substance to the notion, now being actively propagated, of winning power by a general strike arising out of the simultaneous sympathetic action of many unions.

The more or less revolutionary General Strike, we may remember, was not a new idea in England. In both its passive and active moods it had been projected and prepared—moreover it had been widely discussed—in the high days of Owen. But seventy years later English Labour knew, and still knows, comparatively little about the Syndicalist aspect of Owenism. The Fabians were

not interested in it; they put a damper on any such romantic notions.

Nevertheless there was a certain revolutionary response to the revival of the idea of the General Strike when it was revived as a foreign importation. The popular symbol of it was *The Man with the Folded Arms*. The prospect of winning everything by doing nothing was attractive propaganda for the masses. Better understanding of the new doctrine began to spread in 1906 with the publication of a Syndicalist weekly by the Anarchist-Communist Freedom Group, with which Kropotkin and Malatesta were associated. The doctrine soon won more conventional advocates. The new intellectuals of the Left turned to Syndicalism when the failure of the British Socialist Party to give a revolutionary colour to parliamentary action became evident; and in Guild Socialism they gave the doctrine an English turn of development which comes into prominence after the War.

A more important convert to Syndicalism was Tom Mann, returning from Australia after some years, the reputation he had won in the dock strike of 1889 enhanced by colonial Labour successes. He began to preach Syndicalism to the Trade Unions in 1910, and became the leader of a vigorous movement among them. Syndicalist papers were published by several Unions; new Unions were formed; others by amalgamation and otherwise made drastic reforms in their constitutions, adapting themselves to the possibilities of the new Labour technique.

Other conditions were favourable, it is true, to the unrest of those years. Real wages, for the first time in the industrial era, showed a steady decline over a period of years, beginning with the century and amounting to 10 per cent. by 1912. But to Syndicalism was undoubtedly due the enthusiasm of that unrest and the constructive character it took in the most rousing period of Trade Union history. There had been nothing like it since the days of Owen. Old Unions were rejuvenated

and new Unions born with fresh and informed aspirations, strong in the belief that the workers themselves, without parliamentary intervention, would presently snatch the control of industry from the profiteers.

The effect of the ferment is shown by the growth of Trade Union membership in those years : in 1910 it was 2,565,000 ; three years later, 4,135,000. And this time it was solid gain. In spite of many ups and downs, membership has never fallen below that figure. But it was gain of a special character, not shared at first by the Congress, which in the eyes of the Syndicalists was tainted with all the parliamentary vices, as well as with its worst weakness, the domination of a narrow craft Unionism. In the two busiest years of the Syndicalist campaign, while the Trade Unions as a whole gained 770,000 members, the Unions affiliated to the Congress actually showed a loss of 43,000.

Meanwhile the Party was in difficulties, reduced in credit and in cash. Social questions were eclipsed in Parliament by the great political controversies of the day, by Ireland, the Land, and the House of Lords. Party membership was down as a result of the new Trade Union Law, some quarter of a million members of affiliated Unions obtaining exemption from the parliamentary levy. There were also plenty of internal difficulties for the Party. With decreasing satisfaction it was supporting the Liberals in Parliament and bargaining with them in the constituencies, while striving to maintain a bold front of independence in the public eye. Moreover, the attitude of the Party toward Syndicalism was driving it further away from its Trade Union basis.

The political problem which Syndicalism presented was well understood and might possibly have been sympathetically solved by Keir Hardie, faithfully sticking to his principle of Labour solidarity ; the question simply annoyed Ramsay MacDonald, who had taken the place of his old leader. MacDonald was never a Trade Unionist and never liked or understood Trade Unionism ; and Snowden, his fellow leader, was like-minded.

Syndicalism challenged their parliamentary promises, and their counter-attack was uncompromising. Their denunciations of Syndicalism, on the platform, in the Press and in published volumes, were as bitter as those of any parliamentary Socialist of the Continent. Nor did they limit their attack to the new doctrine; they riddled the traditional policy of direct action, revealing in facts and figures the pains and losses and limited nature of gains by strikes. And many who heard them wondered.

The controversy made it more difficult than ever for the Movement to envisage, as Hardie wished it might, the possibility of an effective integration of its political and industrial activities. It increased the alternating mentality of the Movement, exaggerated the swing of the pendulum to such a pitch that in retrospect we can see it already doomed to swing wild on both sides to disasters avoidable, even impossible, had Labour been able to reach through internal crisis or a sense of danger to a prospect of synthesis instead of antithesis.

There was no such crisis, no sense of danger to unite it. But the Movement could not be split, as in other countries, not being built so much in sections as in layers, with every layer an integral part of the larger layer beneath it. These pyramidal layers before the War were, in round millions of members: Trade Unions, 4; Co-operative Societies, 3; Labour Party, 2. The smallest layer was MacDonald's sphere, but only a small part of it was convinced by his Socialism; nor by any means was Tom Mann's larger field entirely converted to Syndicalism. They were leaders of minorities, linked, but at a distance. There was no ideological crisis in the neutral and governing sphere, the Congress. Labour was never invited to choose between a mutually exclusive Socialism and Syndicalism, nor exclusively between the two methods, parliamentary and industrial, to the alternating use of which the Movement was already accustomed.

CHAPTER IX

END OF A ROMANTIC CHAPTER

SOCIAL and political controversies at home obscured the world issues that led to war, and Labour, like the rest of the nation, was taken by surprise. The Labour attitude toward foreign affairs had been simple and clear enough. Much more ambitious in theory, the policy was actually less interfering than it became later. Its first principle was that British organised Labour should denounce and restrain the foreign wickedness of British Capitalism. The Party in those days really believed in that wickedness, and was more concerned about it than about the wickedness of any foreign country, even Germany or Russia. Beyond that, we trusted the people of foreign countries to deal with their own in their own way, and however much that way might differ from ours, we did not avoid international relations on that account. Socialism covered a multitude of differences.

The Trade Union Movements in other countries took much the same view of Labour's proper international function. The general object of their collaboration was social and economic, not political. Labour internationalism was anti-Capitalist by design, anti-nationalist as an afterthought. The Anti-Militarist movement promoted anti-nationalism. The International Federation of Trade Unions, founded in 1901, kept out of politics, resisting the appeal of its French section. The Second Socialist International (1900) was involved from the beginning, and came to an end more dubious as well as more tragic than that of the First. The same Socialists who as national leaders at home contemned the General Strike, disliked it in theory, and had no faith in it whatever, as international leaders nevertheless adopted it for

the specific against war, and went on talking about it right up to the outbreak of hostilities. Some of them were honest about it. Keir Hardie died broken-hearted.

The War, relevant here only as a passing incident in the class conflict, was a confusing and in many ways a reactionary experience. National unity, like the virtue of our war aims, was real for those who did not survive the illusion. The class truce was a sham. Never since the first wild onslaught of Capitalist exploitation had there been such profiteering. It was systematic; the most innocent capitalists and shareholders, mine-owners, ship-owners, chemical and other manufacturers, could not avoid it; the money was thrust into their pockets. For the possessing classes the War was a great success financially, as it was for the Crown territorially. Their capital increased by 4,180 million pounds during the War, not very much less than half the Government's expenditure on it.

On Labour's side the 12 million working days lost in strikes was a war record accountable not so much to the workers as to those who forced them to defend their position so, and to a Government which did not know how to utilise the loyalty it might have commanded. Labour was loyal; but class solidarity was still felt by many men at the Front even if their lives were put in greater peril by strikes in the Clydeside workshops and South Wales coal-mines. What they in their hearts were fighting for, they knew, could be lost on the home front, whatever they might win in Flanders. Presently, also among the workers, there rose a strong disposition to make the most of the material opportunities of urgent production. Conscription brought an end to some of the abuses and unfairness of the voluntary system, but it also altered the mood of the workers, putting them, as were the profiteers, on the defensive against the Government.

Only toward the end, however, did that mood become rebellious. After the failure of Kerensky, the Labour

Party grew restive, thinking of its own future, yoked in Coalition with the Liberals and Conservatives. In 1917 Henderson resigned from the War Cabinet. Then Labour's voice led the Allied chorus of friendly assurances about peace negotiations that never took place and Peace Terms which the Peace Treaties ignored.

The national Trade Unions were tied by war-time laws and regulations. They found leadership passing to what had hitherto been a minor category of representatives, the shop stewards, whose local function gave scope to a natural regionalism in Labour which had been discouraged by the exclusion of the Trades Councils from the Congress. Syndicalist ideas revived in altered forms and under different names. Communism became associated with the hope of peace. In 1918, strikes became more numerous and widespread. A successful London police strike was ominous. The shop stewards formed a national organisation, rebellious in mood, Communistic in sentiment, which seemed destined for revolutionary leadership when the men came home from France.

Then quite serenely Labour returned to its traditional ways. The Trade Unions resumed control of their own, while ample army gratuities and a selective process of demobilisation averted the danger of mass rebellion. What was left of the shop stewards' movement distributed itself between the I.L.P., Guild Socialism, and the new Communist Party. Wages were high. There was a brief illusion of prosperity while the profiteers spoiled the foreigner, preparing his ruin and their own. In 1920, although the quantity of our exports was 30 per cent. less than in 1913, we received 809 million pounds more in payment for them.

In those seven years, Trade Union membership had doubled. The peak of 8,334,000 members was reached in 1920, a rapid increase after the War being due not only to high wages but to the high spirits in which the Movement resumed its alternating course. There was a stronger reaction than usual from parliamentary to

industrial activities following the general election of 1918, partly because this was marked by every kind of trickery, dishonesty and false representation that could discredit a parliamentary régime. And there was an uneasy feeling that the politicians were doing even worse things to the Peace. In these circumstances the workers turned to their Unions with a renewal of the Syndicalist purpose which the War had interrupted, and the mind of Labour turned to constructive and ambitious plans in a manner which gives these post-War years an echo of those of Owen. In particular, the intellectuals who took up Syndicalism before the War had thoroughly anglicized its main ideas, which now began to have some influence under the name of Guild Socialism.

An early success of the National Guilds League founded by them in 1915 had been its influence on certain Government reconstruction schemes during the War. One of these was the Report of a committee on industrial relations known as the Whitley Committee, which gave its name to many joint councils set up in accordance with its recommendations. To the same Committee was due also the extension of Trade Boards already mentioned. Under its Liberal chairman, the Whitley Committee propounded, as if in a final social effort of expiring Liberalism, the ground plan of a great corporate scheme for industry. In other circumstances the scheme might well have led to a reconciliation of Liberalism and Socialism in the development of a corporative or guild system which would have satisfied the special English principles of both political ideals ; but it was superficial, without social foundations, and lacked authority ; and the employers were afraid that it gave the workers too much opportunity for sharing control ; the workers, that it gave them too little. Nevertheless, the idea of such reconstruction is the leading motive in industrial development to-day and its kernel, Guild Socialism, is interesting for this reason as well as for its own record.

The first Guild plan was produced by the joint council

of the building industry. It did not follow the lines of the Whitley scheme, which allowed for the continued conflict of class interests while seeking to provide a measure of labour-employer collaboration, but sought to eliminate the conflict, or to remove the incidence of it, by making the industry a joint undertaking of salaried employers and wage-earners working with borrowed capital. The refusal of the employers to collaborate made the plan inapplicable to existing enterprise, and its promoters reverted to an older model, that of the Owenite producing society, which Italian Co-operation has preserved. Several building guilds of this kind were formed and were united in a national federation. There was a great national need for new houses and Government aid given on this account favoured their enterprise. For two years they flourished, completing construction for about two million pounds, while smaller guilds were active in other industries. Then, caught in a trade slump and Government aid withdrawn, as rapidly as its predecessor in Owen's day the National Building Guild collapsed. With it came down the smaller guilds. The whole movement dissolved.

The eclipse of Guild Socialism as a national, above all as a native, movement was not due to business misadventure alone. It was part of a general breakdown of Socialist theory, a foreshadowing of failure in action both direct and parliamentary. For one of the essential aims, and the greatest failure, of the brilliant exponents of Guild Socialism—Penty, Carpenter, S. G. Hobson, Orage, G. D. H. Cole—was to find a way of escape from that fatal alternativism of Labour, from the romanticism of the General Strike as well as from the mirage of the General Vote. They kept to the English highway pioneered by Owen, but brought into their doctrine many ideas then new and still not forgotten. Syndicalism was rescued from the catastrophic order of events by a new time-schedule of "encroaching control." Its offspring, Industrial Unionism, was thriving. The widespread acceptance of a "functional" conception of property

implied a right of Labour organisations to assume authority for their proper functions. The case for producer-organisations as against the Co-operative theory of consumer-production was revived. The challenging proposition of Social Credit already had a following.

The Guild Socialists went far, though in the event not far enough, to popularise their ideas among the Unions, despite the Party's more engaging talk about nationalisation, and all the slick promises of Communism. Orage defined a Guild as "a self-governing association of mutually dependent people organised for a responsible discharge of a particular function of society." A Guild would be democratically controlled, but not on the proletarian principle of a mass vote on every question. Democratic procedure must be functionalised. Labour matters would be decided by the workers, technical matters by technicians. To whom the Guild itself would be responsible was a much-debated point. Cole saw a new political system rising entire from an economic foundation of productive Guilds working in conjunction with "other democratic functional organisations." Not rising through parliamentary action, however; that would take a century. The only use for the parliamentary weapon, according to another Guildist, was "to hamper the operations of Capitalism and to educate the workers."

Business enterprise seemed the most natural method of approach, but in the manner of its undertaking it was a short cut and led the pioneers astray. Some of them reverted to nationalisation as a necessary transitional measure, some to parliamentary Socialism or Communism, some to the revolutionary possibilities of the General Strike. For lack of a consistent revolutionary theory behind it the movement went into doctrinal eclipse on its first material failure.

But revolutionary faith in the General Strike was already waning. The dilemma to which such action must lead had been exposed by Malatesta before the War, warning the International Anarchist Congress of 1907 that the economic General Strike was an illusion. Cole

in *Guild Socialism* put the question simply: How were the workers, without starving themselves, to hold up the economic mechanism of society for a long enough time to cause the political and economic structure of the present system to fall to ruins? But Cole had not quite reached the end of the romantic chapter. He still could picture a grand climax toward which the forces of Labour might be moving, a crisis in which the workers would be under "the immediate and imperative necessity of occupying simultaneously many thousand strategic points—not merely of seizing power at the centre and improvising a provisional government, but of seizing thousands of local bodies, of taking over and improvising administrations in many thousands of factories, of learning in a day a thousand lessons of self-mastery and communal service. I do not say that it could not be done; but I say that its doing would be a miracle."

In a day.

For a limited objective, however, faith in the General Strike was still growing, spread by the Communists. They urged its trial on every occasion, and in 1920 succeeded in getting a vote taken on it by the Congress. The proposal that a General Strike should be called to force the Government to nationalise the coal-mines in accordance with the current demand of the Miners' Federation was rejected by a 4 to 1 majority.

All through the Movement now was growing the anticipation of battle. The Trade Unions had never been so strong in membership or in fighting spirit. The country had been awed by a successful national railway strike in 1919, and there had been other demonstrations. There had been no trial of strength, however, between the main forces which had been consolidated on both sides since 1914. Out of wartime opportunity the employers had developed a General Staff in the Confederation of their organisations. Labour had been less enterprising. Its most formidable combination was the Triple Alliance, which depended upon an agreement between the miners, the railwaymen, and the transport

workers to co-ordinate their programmes. Its obligations were somewhat ambiguous but were generally regarded by the movement at large as calling for a strike by all on the demand of any one of the Big Three.

The railwaymen had not appealed to the Triple Alliance in 1919. Nor did the miners invite action in their support in their national strike of 1920, though badly needing it. Next year, faced by a national lockout, there was no choice for it: whether the other leaders liked it or not, under pressure of real desperation in the coalfields and increasing Communist influence there, the miners' leaders made a public call for unconditional support. The Triple Alliance failed to come into action, and the whole foundations of the Movement were shaken by its failure.

On the other hand, the threat of such action was made the occasion for passing an Emergency Powers Act, the Government's first step in preparation for the greater crisis now foreseeable. For two Royal Commissions had made it known that the mining industry was in a bad way, that the situation indeed was irremediable; and the Government knew that the mine-owners were determined to impose upon the miners conditions such as no strongly organised workers had ever accepted. As a beginning, the Miners' Federation, vainly fighting alone, was humiliated by the dictated terms after the lockout; the Federation still has not recovered recognition as a negotiating body.

The total number of working days lost in strikes and lockouts that year, 1921, was 82,269,000, equivalent of a ten-days' general strike of all the Unions. Next year a national lockout humbled the great Union of the Engineers. Moreover, unemployment now rose to the two-million mark. There was little improvement in the next two years. And in those two years Trade Union membership fell from 8.3 to 5.5 millions. The Unions were exhausted. Direct action was discredited. Once more, in the distraction of a timely general election, the hopes of the workers turned to parliamentary action.

For a short time they were at great heights, with the Labour Party's assumption of Government in 1924.

With this brief diversion, which comes into the narrative later, the Labour pendulum reached its parliamentary height, and swung the more swiftly back toward the other extreme. The miners were soon again the centre of a now embittered conflict. For a time coal had made higher profits, owing to the French invasion of the Ruhr, and paid better wages. But in the following year, 1925, the Baldwin Government, feeling prepared to meet the economic and labour disturbances it must cause, took the step for which Churchill and his financial advisers were pressing, a return to the Gold Standard. An immediate effect of this was to penalise exports, including especially coal. The mine-owners demanded in compensation that the workers should still further reduce their already low standard of living by taking less pay for longer hours. The Union leaders' reply was: "Not a penny off the pay, not a second on the day." And once more the Federation appealed to their fellow Trade Unionists, not to an ambiguous alliance this time but to the sentiment of the whole Movement.

Now a great change of opinion had taken place in the public mind, as well as in the Movement, since 1921. The public in 1925 knew much more about working conditions in the mines. Such revealing facts as that, each year, one in every five miners is incapacitated through injury, had moved sentiment to a degree which the leaders reckoned would warrant even a most disturbing demonstration in their defence, or at least the threat of one. The Congress was well aware of this change of sentiment. Not so apparently the Government, until actually faced with the threat of a General Strike. The crisis was then hurriedly postponed for a year, the Government paying as a wages subsidy the compensation demanded by the mine-owners; and both sides set about preparing for a supreme trial of strength.

Labour's preparation, however, consisted only in keeping together the loose formation provided by the

Congress and its General Council. To the latter, which should have been a General Staff, the Unions had never accorded any such authority. Nor did they now, until it was too late for any possibility of envisaging the whole momentous issue. Before they knew what they were doing, the General Council had let slip a revolutionary political challenge to Government, which a General Strike must be.

In the event, although strike orders were issued systematically by the Unions, each day extending the field of operations and for nine days loyally and calmly obeyed, the General Council had neither plan nor aim. From the first moment after the strike began, the leaders on the Council had no other thought than how to call it off as quickly as possible.

That was understandable; for the issue from that first moment was no longer industrial, but the high political question of who was to govern England, the Cabinet or the General Council. Less accountable seemed the delay in proclaiming the end of an action patently lost from the beginning. The Labour leaders were not alone responsible for its prolongation. The employer-government deliberately kept them waiting several days for even a pretence of face-saving terms, stretching the experience to the fullest extent of a lesson for the Trade Unions that they should never forget, knowing well enough that, although it was a revolutionary situation, there was no longer any of the old romantic imagination or leadership among the workers to precipitate a revolution, but only a few talkative Communists and The Man with the Folded Arms.

The Great Strike produced no leader on either side, unless it can be said that the employers produced Mr. Churchill. It produced no new policy, no new movement; only a sense of finality, of the end of a chapter, in the minds of the workers.

On the employers' side there were new laws, definitively prohibiting sympathetic strikes, making even the threat of a General Strike look like high treason, and

further hampering Trade Union support of the law-abiding Party.

They were unnecessary measures. It was in no faint-hearted obedience to the law that the Trade Unions presently began the patient search for a new policy, no legal restraint that made the average annual total of working days lost in disputes during the subsequent years just about one-sixth of the preceding average for the century, but an inner conviction in moderate minds that the method had ceased to be profitable, and in revolutionary minds that enough had already been paid for lessons in a revolutionary technique no longer real. In those first twenty-six years of the century the cost in working time lost had been nearly 500 million days, or a lost army of 69,000 men industrially idle during the whole of that first quarter of the century, fighting Labour's battles, with folded arms.

"The strike and the lockout are, on the face of it, ridiculous things," wrote Cole in his *Short History* a few years later. "It would be absurd in any reasonably ordered society for men to settle their differences by such means."

Direct action had raised the status of the worker from that of a beggar to that of a negotiator; strikes had made Labour a power instead of a commodity; but not by such means, it was now clear, not by the miracle of a General Strike, was the reasonably ordered society to be established in England. By the parliamentary miracle, then? To this question, with the hopes of the Movement, the narrative must again turn.

CHAPTER X

BEGINNING OF DEMOCRACY

THE miracle of direct action was to be a spontaneous transformation of society, as we have seen, "in a day." From parliamentary action the Labour Party could not allow any less to be expected. Instead of a General Strike, a General Vote. Some day the working classes would all go to the polls with one mind and a Labour Government would then constitutionally, by Act of Parliament, transform society. That was the miracle, parliamentary revolution, in which the political leaders of Labour could still in all honesty invite their followers to believe when the Party resumed its independence of action after the War; they believed in it themselves.

The popular basis of a parliamentary *régime*, on which might be established either working-class rule or an all-class parliamentary democracy, had been completed by the extension of the franchise to women. The Liberal strength was exhausted by War feuds and the trickeries of Peace. After the 1918 elections, with its old leader shut out of the House and Lloyd George prematurely attempting to establish a permanent National Government, the Liberal Party was evidently going to pieces. There was good reason for the Labour Party to prepare to take its place as the official Opposition, natural claimant to office when Lloyd George's wizardry should fail. In such a position a broader basis for the Party was felt to be necessary. Several Labour leaders had been members of the War Government and could appreciate the difficulties of personnel which the prospect of office presented to the Party as then constituted. And not only of personnel; already some of them were beginning to realise that a Labour Government would have to avoid being a class Government.

The constitution of the Party had stood the strain of the War in spite of sharp differences of opinion between the Trade Unions and the Socialist societies. Both the Independent Labour Party and the British Socialist Party had been what was called pro-German, and the Fabians were divided. The only way to become a member of the Party, for other than Trade Unionists, was by joining one of the Socialist societies; and at the end of the War there were many who were ready to enter, but not by those doors. The Party therefore opened wider doors to them, and they came in from all sides—soldiers, pacifists, conscientious objectors, Radicals, Communists, Liberals, and simple careerists—mostly middle-class and professional people, now included in the Party's invitation to all "workers by hand or brain." But it was still expected that organised labour, the plain hand-workers, would all vote together some day.

Previous changes in the Party, we have seen, modified its relations with the Trade Unions under the Labour alliance of Keir Hardie; the reform of 1918 enlarged the scope of the Party far beyond that alliance. The new openings for members were made by admitting individuals to direct membership of local parties in the constituencies, instead of through membership of affiliated Unions and societies. From this time the Constituency Labour Parties form a separate influence in the Party, later to win them a position of independence in it, taking the place of the Socialist societies.

Municipal Socialism was given fresh impetus by this greater local freedom; a Constituency Party could now recruit leading citizens among the local people and make terms with others. In national politics also the local party could do very much what it liked within the extremely easy conditions of the national Party discipline. One of the new ex-Liberal delegates, for instance, an officer and a gentleman, could with impunity inform the Labour Party Conference of 1920 that he accepted whips from every party in the House.

When at last a line had to be drawn, it was not on the

wide-open right flank of the Party. Nor was it by intention of the Party that it was drawn on the Left, excluding the Communists. Labour certainly had given Kerensky a big official welcome when he came to London as a refugee from Bolshevism, but the "Hands off Russia" Committee in 1920 had the support of the Party, and in that year the Trades Union Congress took a strong stand against giving military assistance to Poland against Soviet Russia. When, however, the Communist Party was formed in that year, its application for affiliation to the Labour Party was made in terms which could not be reconciled with the Labour constitution. The new Party was at that time the negligible heir of the B.S.P. and the S.D.F. Only some years later, when Communist efforts were directed to the creation of a minority Movement among the Trade Unions and a permanent organisation of the unemployed, did the Communists make any impression on the Labour Movement. But indirectly they brought down, and then with the help of Moscow humiliated, the first Labour Government.

Two years before that event the elections of 1922 confirmed the new character of the Labour Party and of its leadership. MacDonald and Snowden were back again in Parliament, their War record forgotten if not forgiven, and around them was a new stand of ministerial timber of all classes only waiting to be used. From seventy-five members, the Parliamentary Party had grown to 142.

In the following year came another opportunity. Mr. Baldwin became flustered, anticipating the need of many autarchic measures to come, and appealed to the country for a new economic mandate. This was refused. Labour won an additional fifty seats, while the Conservatives were put in a minority of ninety against a Liberal-Labour combination. The Liberals now had to make the choice between combining with the Conservatives or putting Labour into office. Early in 1924, after long negotiations and hesitations, they gave way to MacDonald.

Being dependent upon the votes of other Parties, no miracle was to be expected. It could not be a Socialist Government, the Party leaders explained, reassuring the general public and warning their own followers, but only a rehearsal. MacDonald himself was more outspoken; he declared that Labour in office must not seek to legislate only for workers, but for the whole nation. This was going a long way—though it was not so understood—toward acknowledging that the parliamentary miracle would not take place, or would be very different from what had been promised. In office it was easy to see the dilemma to come. Some day he would return to Downing Street with a majority behind him, no longer able to point to his lack of it to account for the absence of a Socialist miracle which he knew neither he nor anyone else could accomplish without wrecking the parliamentary régime.

The question had long been a speculation of Anarchists and other outsiders, but was now becoming a problem of actuality: what would happen to the parliamentary régime when the Party system had been brought into its inevitable class alignment, with Labour, on one side, pledged to abolish Capitalism, on the other. The most widespread and deep-rooted aspiration of the English people since Chartist days was not indeed for a working-class Government, but for the abolition of class rule, for parliamentary democracy. How was that to be obtained if class became identified with party, if the rise of the Labour Party, which had seemed to be bringing parliamentary democracy nearer, in fact brought only a reversal and intensification of class rule?

MacDonald's two Labour Administrations are more remarkable as steps toward a solution of that constitutional problem than for anything that was done in them. Snowden's first Budget was a conventional Liberal composition. The only outstanding measure of the first Administration was the Housing Act of John Wheatley, whose inexplicable exclusion from MacDonald's second Cabinet, and his death a few years later, robbed the Party

of a leader who might well have been a worthy successor to Keir Hardie.

There is still something mysterious about the ending of the first Labour Administration and the Russian connection with it. As his own Foreign Secretary, MacDonald was engaged in negotiations for a treaty with the Soviet Government, which seem to have been as difficult as those of 1939. Meanwhile a Communist paper, *The Workers' Weekly*, subsidised by the Comintern and vehemently abusing the Labour Government, went a bit too far. Prosecution of the editor was undertaken. Then it was suddenly and unaccountably withdrawn. The Liberals made a scandal of it, glad of any excuse now for turning against the Government, to get MacDonald out of office and put an end to the Russian negotiations. On the eve of the elections a long letter of instructions to the English Communists, signed by Zinoviev of the Comintern, was published. A strongly-worded protest was sent to Moscow by the Foreign Office, where MacDonald still ruled; but he gave no explanation of it to the public or to his Party. The Russian Treaty negotiations and Labour's ambiguous position regarding them became the main issue of the elections. Put in a ridiculous plight of uncertainty and equivocation, it was only surprising that Labour did not lose more than forty-two seats. The Liberals, their immediate challengers, lost very much more heavily, retaining only thirty-nine seats out of 152. The Conservatives resumed office with a comfortable majority.

His careless manner of leaving office indicated that MacDonald's mind was not on the future of his Party. Had his whole purpose been to play for his side, he would have planned a noble exit, a moral victory to shine forth in the defeat that must inevitably come; he would have found some popular working-class issue upon which to be out-voted. Just as Keir Hardie never lost an opportunity of making Parliament his megaphone to the electorate, so MacDonald would have made that supreme moment of the Party an occasion for consolidating his

popular support. But now, instead, a new schismatic tendency appeared on the Left, not Communist, indeed still anti-Communist, but issuing from Hardie's old party, the I.L.P., of which MacDonald was still nominally chairman. For the first time, in turning away from parliamentary action, the Movement threatened to carry a block of parliamentarians permanently into the field of direct action. "Socialism in Our Time" was adopted as a slogan by this consistently Socialist wing of the Party.

This revival of the old Socialist spirit greatly aided the campaign for the miners, which culminated in the General Strike, but it also remained a disturbing factor in the Party after that demonstration. When the pendulum of action set in for its last great parliamentary swing, the Party was no longer the united if somewhat amorphous body it had been in 1923.

Thanks to the continued eclipse of the Liberals, however, Labour went into the 1929 elections with greater confidence than ever, and there was a strong appeal to the casual electors, whose mobile vote was usually decisive, that, as "the Labour lot" had done no harm before they should be given another chance. The issue was personified in Baldwin and MacDonald, actually like-minded, as later events were to show, but cast as Capital and Labour on the election stage. To the Labour Movement, now under the disillusionment of the General Strike, MacDonald still promised the parliamentary miracle. Labour put all its heart into securing the magic of a General Vote, and won 288 seats in the new Parliament, twenty-eight more than the Conservatives, and the Liberals held only fifty-eight.

Labour was now the largest Party in the House, but still lacked the majority that would call for a miracle. This time it was no rehearsal, however. MacDonald at once announced a new policy—the policy which was destined to solve the constitutional problem of parliamentary democracy. At the time it was only regarded as propitiatory, as asking for tolerance, rather than inviting

collaboration. But the suggestion was that all the parties of the House should consider themselves "more as a Council of State and less as arrayed regiments facing each other in battle," and Baldwin welcomed this suggestion, saying that, for domestic and foreign reasons (this was in 1929, long before the days of the Axis), it was desirable that they should "face the world as a united Parliament."

During his second Administration, MacDonald began systematically to cut himself off from his old associates as if in anticipation of the disloyalty with which he was presently to wound them. Not only those he had already discarded as he had Wheatley, but one after another friends he had included in his present Government were alienated. And he would have nothing done by them. There may have been some instinctive shrinking from action until a greater decision had been taken, but to his colleagues it seemed like simple indifference and obstructionism. Mosley, assigned to special work on the unemployment problem, was snubbed for his pains, and resigned from the Government and the Party in disgust. A loyalty test was adopted for Labour members. Maxton and others were driven out of the Party, which soon had two critics at its heels, the I.L.P. and the Communists, as well as its head in the air. And it was faced with terrible working-class suffering, with a problem for which there was not only no solution, but not even, by agency of the Labour Party, the possibility of applying the obvious charitable palliatives. Unemployment, steadily rising for some years, climbed up to 22 per cent. of all insured workers in 1931.

The unemployment problem plainly called for that collaboration of all parties, that Council of State, for which MacDonald had asked when taking office. There was no reason why it should not have come in 1931 in much wider measure and without the secret and exasperating intrigue of MacDonald and Snowden with the leaders of the other parties. Many of MacDonald's associates, he knew, even if they were no longer in his personal confidence, had demanded party collaboration for dealing

with unemployment ; Lansbury, for one, had been doing so for years. Nor need the financial question have created political panic. The sum required to take up all the accumulated slack of the unemployed insurance scheme was 59 million pounds. In 1938 it was considered quite normal that the Unemployment Assistance Board should spend 38 millions in a single year.

But the City and Wall Street were in a state of great fear in 1931. War had not shaken the pillars of Capitalism ; in the great depression their very foundations seemed to be sinking. And "the Socialists" were asking for money to give away. That is how the case appears to have been put to the financiers, masters of Capitalism, by MacDonald and Snowden, masters of the situation but not of their own Party. They made no serious effort to unite their Party for collaboration with the other parties.

To members of his Government not in MacDonald's personal confidence, still more to humbler workers in the Party and to the rank and file, the open arms of the Conservatives and the closed fists of the financiers could only appear as a political temptation and an economic challenge to both of which MacDonald had succumbed. Thus, partly through personal aloofness, partly through the manner in which the great decision was taken, MacDonald failed to carry with him any considerable section of the Party when he formed a National Government, as previously arranged with the leaders of the other parties.

In the elections held to confirm this palace revolution, the enrolled hosts of Labour, now led by Lansbury, stood firm. Trade Unionist support of the Party was not weakened by the passing of MacDonald and Snowden, leaders who had always belittled Trade Unionism except when they wanted to make political use of it. But the casual voters were mobilised on a great scale by a cheap electioneering scare. Snowden told them that, if Labour won, England would be forced off the Gold Standard and the savings of the workers in the Post Office would

be lost. England duly and advantageously went off gold some months later, as Snowden knew it must. Meanwhile the scaremongers won a sweeping victory. Labour in the House was reduced to an insignificant group.

It was too much to expect that the loyal and outraged leaders of the Party should see in all this anything more than a conspiracy against themselves and the cause. Even to-day they cannot publicly admit that any great change took place in 1931; and from devoted supporters they still demand faith in the miracle of the General Vote. But slowly elsewhere the suspicion grew that all that had been said about National Government, beginning with MacDonald's "Council of State" and Baldwin's "United Parliament," made a great deal more sense when added up together than any of the separate speakers knew or intended. The Nationalists had spoken and acted with various motives, saying and doing in clumsy fashion what was necessary to get them out of immediate difficulties; yet all the time they were solving blindfold the problem of a century, the parliamentary problem of all time.

The practice of a Government being formed alternatively by one party and then by another always threatened disaster to the *régime* whenever party alignment should coincide with irreconcilable class interests. It had broken down at the first hint of such a prospect. Henceforth there would not be a series of Governments, but a continuous Government, a kaleidoscopic national focus of interests and ideas, parties and personalities. Moreover, whatever party or group happened at the time to be irreconcilable, and therefore excluded from Government, would be attached to Government by creating a governmental position for the Leader of the Opposition, making him in effect a consultant Minister.

So much has been done. The parliamentary *régime* has been saved. The parliamentary ground floor of a democracy, the English way of trying to be united without being totalitarian, has been built upon the

foundations of universal suffrage, replacing the old alternating party system. The party pendulum has disappeared. There are now more than two sides to a question, more than two possible ways of doing a thing ; but only one agency for doing it, the National Government.

Meanwhile the Labour Party clung to the old order, vainly trying to consolidate an ideological position. Shocked by middle-class betrayal of the Party, the rank and file of the Movement were more ready than they had ever been for consolidation on simple class lines. But the restless spirits of the Party, those who were to upset everybody by demanding a Popular Front in 1939, were such pure Socialists in 1931 that they would not make any ideological compromise, even for class consolidation. The Trade Unions had been made more class-conscious, but not Socialist, by the MacDonald betrayal. They were cautiously feeling their way toward a new industrial policy, in which they were actually more in harmony with the great change in Parliament than was the Party.

The elections of 1935 brought back the Parliamentary Party to the respectable number of 154, but did not restore its internal balance. Its domestic programme was unstable : one day it would nationalise the banks, the next, no such thing : one day it would impose a capital levy, then it wouldn't, and then again in 1939 it sounded as if it would. In foreign affairs the Party floundered in limited shallows of internationalism, refusing to vote arms, at the same time shouting words of ideological hatred with menaces of action that would involve war. Its bellicosity had driven Lansbury to resign the leadership of the Party, earlier in 1935, when the militant leaders of the Parliamentary Party insisted upon a policy which would have led to war with Italy. Their defiant attitude only stiffened when the policy they did not think went far enough, having encircled Italy, drove her into an alliance with Germany.

For some time after this, all through the Spanish War, the Party was at sea. Its leaders no longer treated inter-

national relations as possibly based upon contact between workers in different countries, but only as a question of ideological and strategic advantages. Comparative social progress had lost its interest. They did not know or care, for instance, that Italian workers were actually getting in the name of Fascism many things which they could only hope to give the English workers some day in the name of Socialism. Lansbury alone lived up to a resolute internationalism, himself going to talk things over with the three working-class leaders who had taken the place of Capitalists as the heads of three great nations. But in such steps the other Labour politicians had neither part nor interest; the Party had wandered so far from Labour realities that it presently found itself in the position of ginger-group instead of Opposition, blindly pushing the Government further in whatever twist of direction Chamberlain might give imperial policy.

The Party found nothing to be done at home, but there were plenty of foreign causes to agitate humanitarian feelings, and its leaders put no check on agitation, knowing that they would not be called upon to carry out the policy of castigation to which they were moved. Refugees from one country after another, from Germany, Spain, Austria, Czechoslovakia, joining the long-established Italian expatriates, stirred the national pity, exasperating partisan feeling much as the Belgian refugees worked us up to war pitch in 1914. The effect of refugee mentality was evident, and became a subject of public concern. "Some part, probably a large part, of international misunderstandings," Sir Ernest Benn wrote in a letter to *The Times* in May, 1939, "is due to groundless rumour, biased report and exaggerated fact. The émigré is, of course, afflicted with a bias and cannot be an agent of peace and understanding." A month later an authoritative Labour voice warned the Party. Ernest Bevin reminded the National Conference that the main factor in world disorder was not Nazism or Fascism, but "British Imperialism, beginning with Ottawa."

About the same time, in the summer of 1939, the

Parliamentary Party became more sober. Their bellicosity had encouraged the Government to introduce Conscription and helped to make it acceptable by the public. Appeasement had given way to a policy nearer to their own, and through the many consultations with Government in the various crises of that year, the new situation of an Opposition had become more apparent. There was no Party prospect of office to impose responsibility, but a new responsibility began to be observed, that which Opposition formally shares with Government in the new parliamentary democracy.

CHAPTER XI

THE LABOUR STRENGTH

THE recovery of the Labour Movement from its industrial and political disappointments has been slow, as might be expected considering the great readjustment of aims and ideas which has been and still is proceeding. In some sections recovery still lags far behind the peak year, 1920, numerically; but now the importance of what has been called the background of the Labour Movement, the Co-operative Movement, becomes apparent in seeking to make an estimate of the real strength of Labour. The growth of Co-operation, its membership increasing year by year, scarcely affected by strikes and elections and little even by wars, is a remarkably steady indicator of the Labour potential, of the expanding limits to which other less stable parts of the Movement have always returned or in due course will reach. After allowing for considerable indifference in the great Co-operative fellowship and for the fact that its members are mainly of the upper working classes with a considerable middle-class admixture, Co-operation is still to be reckoned as a Labour reserve and must be brought into the account on this side in any estimate of class alignment.

Once more, then, picturing the Labour Movement as a pyramidal construction of various layers, each layer an integral part of the larger layer beneath it, we get a comparison which is probably as truly indicative of the class strength as figures can be. The pre-War proportions of the main layers, the Unions, Co-operation, and the Party, in round millions of members, were: 4, 3, 2. In the peak year of Trade Unionism, 1920, they were: 8.3, 4.5, 4.3. In 1925, on the eve of the General Strike: 5.5, 4.9, 3.3. To-day, with Co-operation in

first place as foundation layer, the proportions are: Co-operation, 10; the Unions, 5; the Party, 2.6. This gross potential must be kept in mind as the proper measure of strength behind the Labour Movement when considering the present condition of its more variable sections, the Trade Unions and the Party. Besides their own particular crises, there are special reasons to-day which in large part account for their backwardness.

Party membership was less affected by the crisis of 1931 than by previous legislation which made personal assent necessary for Trade Union contributions. To-day it is just over 2,600,000. Of this, two million are affiliated Trade Union members, the Party receiving in this way about two-fifths of the possible Trade Union allegiance. The remainder are members of local Constituency Parties, which since 1937 have been a separate component of the Party, in effect taking the place of the Socialist societies. They have allotted to them, for separate election, 7 of the 25 seats on the National Executive Committee, 13 members being elected by the Trade Unions, and 5 women members by the Conference at large. The members elected by the Constituency Parties at the 1939 Conference were all well-known spokesmen of the Party; among those elected by the Unions there was hardly a name known to the general public. This in itself indicates the degree in which the Constituency Parties have assumed the leadership once held by the Socialist societies, with this difference, however, that the Constituency Parties are much more dependent upon middle-class leaders.

Between these new leaders and those of the Trade Unions there is increasing competition. The aim of the Constituency Parties is to abolish the national affiliation of Trade Unions with the Party, which form of affiliation still makes the Trade Union vote the deciding factor in Party policy whenever it is mobilised for that purpose, and to substitute for it the affiliation of Trade Union branches to their local Constituency Parties. In this way the Party would once and for all cut loose from Congress

and the national Trade Unions. It would also put an end to professional representation in Parliament, instinctive in Trade Unionism, practised for many years by the strong miners' group, and still effective wherever a local party is controlled by a Union. But the situation is complicated by the financial dependence of the national Party upon the national Unions; if the Constituency Parties want a new kind of national Party they will have to pay for it.

The complete regionalisation of the Labour Party and renunciation of professional representation in Parliament would help toward making the new parliamentary democracy work on national instead of on Party lines, were the Constituency leaders of the Party animated by a spirit of collaboration in politics similar to that of the Trade Unions in industry. But this they have not yet demonstrated. They come from the middle classes, proclaiming class collaboration, but so far they have made overtures to other parties only in the manner of the old-fashioned Party intrigues, and in order to break up the new national system rather than to take their place in it, to restore the old rather than participate in the new one.

An effort to secure in this way the possibility of forming an alternative Government, by creating a Popular Front with Liberals and disgruntled Conservatives, was a recent cause for the expulsion of several prominent members of the Party. The expulsions were approved at the 1939 Conference by a large majority. The debate showed that the Party as a whole still adheres not only to the obsolete two-Party system, but to the old hope of a General Vote.

The reason for such a conservative attitude in the Party is partly dogmatic and partly natural. The political leaders of Labour are reluctant to admit that any great change in the character of the class conflict took place in 1931, or that a new parliamentary democracy has taken form out of the events of that year. Measuring the democratic progress of the State by the degree in

which it frees itself from the grip of plutocracy, they cannot regard the formation of a National Government as anything but reactionary. It is a matter of experience that, when it brought their Party low, the plutocratic power raised against itself an adversary more formidable than the party and the system it shattered; it is evident enough that plutocracy must divide to rule, and that only a politically united nation can control the financiers who otherwise control the nation. But the extravagation of the Labour Party not only makes it appear that the new parliamentary democracy must remain inevitably in the clutches of the old plutocracy, but helps to keep it there. The Labour Party alone cannot really challenge the financiers. The constant threat to do so, however, with the counter-threat of financial panic, frightens the technical and managerial classes into submission to the plutocracy.

In his reference to foreign affairs in his speech at the 1939 Conference, the Chairman showed the strain of international crises and rearmament, and he concluded with the customary message of "sympathy and friendship for peoples oppressed by Fascist dictatorship." But, as already noted, there was some return to what was once Labour's customary criticism of British imperialism, and there was a more conciliatory tone than at recent conferences with regard to foreign relations of Labour. Speakers showed some apprehension about the impression made abroad by the strong expression of feeling voiced by Party leaders combined with their support of rearmament. They should see to it that the Italian and German peoples, one speaker urged, be made to realise that they were not warmongers. Requests that international misunderstanding should be removed drew an assurance from the platform that the Executive Committee would consider whether contact with German and Italian people could be arranged.

Thus in sentiment as well as in parliamentary practice the Labour Party was coming slowly into harmony with new domestic and foreign conditions. The Trade Unions have had longer to adjust themselves; the chief

turning-point for them came five years earlier than for the Party; so it is not surprising that more progress has been made in the industrial field. The Party is only reluctantly and shyly taking its place in the State; the Trade Unions are doing so cautiously but openly, welcoming every opportunity. They have their representatives on every Government Committee and Board and Commission of any importance to them, besides being official insurance agents of the State.

The Congress now comprises virtually all Trade Unions excepting those of Government employees which, since the General Strike, have not been allowed to affiliate with it. Another timid and unnecessary restriction. For the Congress has long ago repudiated the whole doctrine centred on the General Strike, and a large majority of Trade Unionists also refuse to support Labour politicians in inviting the General Vote to bring about the downfall of Capitalism. In their nature the Unions seek to make the best of Capitalism, and something better, to convert it to the service of their industry, leaving the parliamentary democracy to tackle the higher money power.

Extension of collaboration between workers' and employers' organisations, beyond the necessary working agreements and the settlement of disputes, we have seen, had been held up much more by the unwillingness of the employers than by working-class distrust of them. The employers' change of heart came after the General Strike. While legislators were alarmed and vindictive, leaders of industry took the initiative for a discussion of industrial policy with the Trades Union Congress, including subjects which hitherto had been considered outside the scope of the Unions. The Chairman of the General Council, H. H. Elvin, in an article in *British Trade Unionism To-day* (1939), declares that these meetings marked "a definite stage in working-class organisation," and he notes that the new orientation of Unionism was based on "the claim that all engaged in industry should have a voice in its management and control."

From this point the General Council, which had not been accorded the authority of a General Staff in the Great Strike, begins to assume duties of a more comprehensive character concerning the planning of industrial relations. From this period date also many joint bodies for conciliation. By Trade Union testimony frequently repeated the employers were found to be different men from those who a generation ago hoped to smash Trade Unionism or more recently still preferred to dictate terms by lockout or impose them after a strike. Force was officially if not yet formally renounced by both sides. Henceforth practically all strikes are of unofficial origin, and few are endorsed by a national Union.

After this industrial start of five years, the Unions were further encouraged toward a policy of collaboration by the crisis of 1931. They were made more class-conscious by it, but unlike the loyal and outraged politicians they could not ignore the economic realities of the day. State requirements for unemployment relief drove the Party leaders to combine for demanding credit which the plutocracy had refused to a single party. Unemployment itself, at the unprecedented height of 22 per cent. of all insured workers, drove the two sides together in the common peril of their industry.

This effect of economic pressure can best be seen in the case of a pioneer industry, the builders. About a million workers are employed in it, of whom more than one-third are enrolled in the sixteen craft Unions forming the National Federation of Building Trades Operatives. As only 21 per cent. of its members are affiliated to the Labour Party it is not political influence on the Federation that has made it progressive. Since 1926 there has been a National Joint Council of the industry. Among other successes the Council solved the builders' perennial problem of wet-time compensation by adopting a contributory scheme, later made statutory and applicable to all employers and workers in the industry under the Unemployment Insurance Act. In the distress of 1931 a decisive step toward industrial

collaboration was taken on the initiative of the workers' Federation. A conference of operatives, employers, architects, surveyors and building material merchants established a permanent body, the Building Industries National Council, to deal with such matters as industrial planning, rationalisation, new building technique, and other general problems arising in the industry. In this way the building craftsmen, by patient organisation and a truly professional interest in their industry, have come nearer than did the builders of those days to the ideal which Owen set before them a century ago and Cole and other Guildists more recently elaborated.

The building Unions are among those which are making good recovery. Membership had fallen from 650,000 in 1920 to 401,000 on the eve of the General Strike; owing to the strike and the effects of the great depression it sank to 311,000 in 1933, but is now not far short of pre-strike strength. The metal trades show a small increase over the 1925 level, 683,000 members; and the large group of transport and general workers has also regained the 1925 level with about 1.5 million members.

Much of the failure of other groups to come up to this standard of recovery is accountable to the contraction of the industries themselves. In textiles, roughly speaking, the membership was halved from 1920 to 1933, and has since lost one-third of that half, bringing it down below 300,000, about one-third of the total employed in these trades. On the other hand the stability of the miners' organisation, under severe conditions of contraction, is shown by recovery to little below the 1933 level of 563,000, although this is far below 1925 and barely half of 1920. In agriculture alone is the situation unredeemed by any sign of progress; membership has fallen from 211,000 in 1920, to 32,000 to-day.

Trade Unionism in agriculture has its peculiar difficulties. The industry itself has suffered a long and severe decline, but it has been assisted by State subsidies on a large scale. Agricultural wages are regulated by

statutory boards whose decisions cover all workers and so discount the need of organisation, as in the case of many other industries in which the benefits of collective bargaining are not limited to members of the Unions. But agricultural Trade Unionism has a curiously unhappy past. The first national Union, founded by Arch in the '70s, ceased with his election to Parliament, and was distinguished by a strange policy: its greatest achievement was that, all the while demanding land nationalisation, it was instrumental in removing no less than 700,000 persons from the English land by emigration to the colonies. Labour has never quite escaped from this combination of agricultural defeatism and land nationalisation. In the one instance of Labour relations from which class antagonism is, if anywhere, absent, the purpose of Labour policy too often seems to be to create antagonism, indeed to abolish farming and reduce agriculture to a proletarian industry, carrying to its logical and tragic conclusion the process of the Enclosure Acts.

The peculiar opportunities of the industry are rather outside the traditional scope of Trade Unionism. But we have seen how that scope has been widening, and there have recently been some local signs of a desire for a more specifically professional policy in agricultural organisation. A district joint meeting of farmers and workers in Suffolk, for instance, demanded the collaboration of the National Farmers' Union and the National Union of Agricultural Workers in the interest of the industry as a whole.

Like other employers, the farmers are now better disposed toward such a possibility than they have ever been before. The Farmers' Union already has a fairly representative membership; the Workers' Union with sixteen organisers is now striving to match it. Any alternative to the present increasing bureaucracy and centralisation would be welcomed by the farmers. The difficulty lies again rather on the other side. The first constructive proposals of a new Minister of Agriculture

were recently denounced in Parliament by a Socialist-Co-operator as being "a piece of Trade Union Syndicalism" on the wrong side.

Among the industries referred to as being wholly covered by collective agreements, non-members as well as members, are cement, chemicals, flour, clay, gas, lead, paper-making, matches, quarrying, dock labour, road passenger transport. About half of those eligible are members of their Unions. The engineers have national agreements, and the miners district ones, of inclusive character. On the other hand there are a number of trades in which the right of collective bargaining is not yet recognised—in the motor car industry, particularly, and in some other mass production trades especially where many women are employed. Nor are collective agreements binding in law excepting those of the statutory Trade and Wages Boards already mentioned. Apart also from these exceptions, although the Minister of Labour may intervene in a Labour dispute and set up a Court of Enquiry, the Ministry has no power to enforce the decisions of that Court.

There are difficulties in the way of greater regularity in these matters, in the way of making collective agreements enforceable by law and universally applicable. Some fear the effect this might have upon membership, but the real difficulty is a conflict of policy which must first be resolved. Complete regulation is incompatible with the freedom to denounce agreements, without legal penalty, as in present circumstances. Strikes may be no part of the official policy, but the right to strike is still a jealously guarded tradition, and the safeguarding of the great funds necessary for any exercise of that right is still the first concern of Trade Union legislators. The legislative problems of to-morrow must wait until the leaders can talk quite freely about them to the rank and file. At present Communist and Socialist influence in this respect is conservative, indeed reactionary, urging a revival of old methods upon the Unions and promising legislation to restore to legality the sympathetic strike

and especially the strike for political purposes, advocating even illegal action to secure that legality.

But though the outlook in the Trade Unions is sometimes conservative, it is neither romantic nor reactionary. With accumulated funds of about 20 million pounds at stake, and an annual income of 8 millions, the Unions are not going to take illegal action. Nor are they likely to pledge any considerable part of those funds either to parliamentary or industrial attempts to restore the methods of an economic conflict whose former circumstances they know can never be restored, the whole spirit of which is changing with the times. Strikes were a natural phenomenon of *laissez-faire*, a necessary arm in the free and remorseless scramble for wealth; in the semi-regulated economy of to-day they are vestigial, and in an economic democracy obsolete.

When the fear of unofficial strikes and undisciplined agitation becomes a thing of the past, the Trades Union Congress will be able to deal in a more generous manner with a problem the solution of which may provide the key to a great Trade Union revival. Trades Councils created the Congress and played a free and important part in the development of it until their locally stimulated enthusiasm tried to drive it too fast. They were excluded from it, as we have seen, for mixed motives, in 1895. After the War they were active centres in the great membership recruitment of those years. There were 560 Trades Councils in 1920. Their numbers diminish from that date, but they were the local rallying points for action in the Great Strike, and several hundred are still in existence, some well established, some only a nominal grouping of Union branches. They are still connected with the Trades Union Congress through a Joint Committee of the General Council of the Congress and their own representatives elected at an annual conference. The Chairman of the General Council has recently suggested that the Trades Councils might become the local representatives of the Congress. But that means national discipline and local responsibility. The same

problem arose in Italy regarding the Chambers of Labour and was never solved under the old *régime*, but making Provincial Unions the representatives of the Confederations has strengthened national organisation and provided the local rallying centres which a movement needs.

In any case, Trade Unionism, if it is to live and grow—and its regional life is as important as that of any political movement—must become more attractive than it is to-day. There is nothing yet visibly capable of carrying membership to the peak of 1920 which experience indicates it will again equal and surpass. Much ground has been recovered, and much will be won when the present policy has come through its experimental phase and begins to find more militant expression. But as yet such workers as those who flocked into their Unions in the stirring controversial days of Tom Mann, and again in the soaring mood of a victorious peace, are sitting outside, discouraged from entering by the Communists, mystified by the Socialists, and cynically watching Mosley's effort to build up a Trade Union following of his own—knowing well, even those who sit outside, that neither he nor any other political leader can go far without the Trade Unions, or go far with them except in their own direction.

Trade Unionism moves, as Keir Hardie liked to say when feeling how slow the movement was, about as quickly as a glacier—and as irresistibly. So slow it seems to many, without strikes, without the promising excitement of General Strike or General Vote. They were great ideas. What is there that can take their place to carry the Movement on to the greater scale of endeavour for which a better future calls?

CHAPTER XII

THE WAY AND THE GOAL

THE main phases of the class struggle which have been sketched here may now be summarised and some interpretation of its present character attempted.

The first overwhelming effort of the possessing classes to increase their possessions, we have seen, reduced the landless workers to Capitalist servitude. The counter-attack of the workers was a blind revolt at first, then later assumed a collective purpose—destruction of the system by which they were being exploited and substitution of a system of production-for-use. The first collectivist campaign quickly miscarried. Meanwhile the workers were being inspired to carry the conflict to a higher plane, demanding the right to contest the parliamentary power which was being used against them.

During the succeeding Capitalist peace, both sides were arming, but the character of the conflict was changing. The pressure of the possessing classes relaxed after their first onslaught, and henceforth they are on the defensive. On the side of the workers also, for those who had anything to defend, the immediate aim of armament was defence, with no further plan of campaign beyond securing limited and local concessions. Toward the end of the century, however, the revolutionary energy of Labour revived, polarized in the two fields of the General Strike and the General Vote. Direct action culminated in 1926; parliamentary Socialism five years later, in 1931. What has taken their place?

The methods of contest have changed, but in essence the conflict remains the same, and Labour's ambition the same. The workers accept the Capitalist system, not only to make the best of it, but to make something better

of it. As economic difficulties increase, this begins to seem desirable also to the other side. Neither side is aggressive; both are on the defensive. But with this difference on the side of the workers, that their original motive persists, maintaining constant pressure for improvement of their conditions of life and labour.

Now this difference, turning to it from contemplation of more heroic aspects of the struggle, may seem to be a small one. But it is all-important. Supposing for a moment that defence were the whole Labour motive, what would be the situation? Combination for defence is a complete political policy so much in favour these days that the case is not beyond imagination. We take pride in the British Commonwealth as a free association of nations for mutual defence, and "collective security" sums up our international outlook. Few of us would take it amiss if told that the main purpose of the State itself is defence, to provide for our safety, Nietzsche's "protective institution for egoistic individuals." Were that true, were that the whole story about us, the Commonwealth would be in danger, the State in fact only "an instrument of the stronger," and the Trade Unions as decadent as the most conservative would like them to be. In a body that is standing still, at rest within and without, Commonwealth or League, State or Trade Union, the wear and tear of defence alone is a cumulative deficit, a rising material expenditure with a lowering moral incentive. But there is more than self-defence in English patriotism; and the Commonwealth of Nations is in no danger while association continues to be a positively helpful as well as defensive factor in world competition. Even more plainly, the Trade Unions will be in no danger of decadence so long as there is in them the additional motive, the little difference between their purpose and that of the employers.

This difference it is that makes Labour the pioneer of social advance, and progress a product of the class conflict. Without it, the conflict would be over, and the leaders might go to sleep behind their secure defences;

and England would sleep. The choice for Labour is not between going Right or going Left ; but between going to sleep or keeping awake to that difference.

In this sense, then, continuity of the conflict may be assumed in any country which is not asleep, and certainly in England where Trade Union activity continues with the persistence of a glacier through the ages. So we may now ask to what it is leading, to what new social and economic conditions it will bring us ? For it is unthinkable that the continuous process of Trade Unionism will not impinge upon, sooner or later radically altering, the general social and economic structure of society.

But such alteration of society is not reform ; it is not evolution, an unfolding ; but revolution, complete change ; and one must think twice before accepting the possibility of revolutionary results from British Trade Unionism. Sudden change, disorder and violence, the General Strike, the General Vote, are still advocated by the Communist or Socialist minority, but they are no longer on the agenda of Trade Unionism, and it is extremely unlikely that they ever will be again. What is there, we have asked, that can take their place ?

The point so often forgotten is that these outgrown things were only means, not ends in themselves. The conception of revolutionary methods has changed ; that of a revolutionary goal, a radical alteration of society, is implicit in the Labour Movement.

Revolutionary theory has changed with our conceptions of other processes, and in the same way that they have most conspicuously changed, namely, in the time factor. The astronomer now needs light-years ; the anthropologist counts in millions where he was previously satisfied with thousands. Just so the revolutionary demands years, now, instead of days, decades instead of weeks.

Nobody nowadays seriously talks, as we did a generation ago, about revolution " in a day," and only defeatists talk about " the inevitability of gradualness." The revolutionary spirit of to-day, neither vainly impatient

nor cowed, but only more realistic, is bringing its conceptions into harmony with the expanding scientific outlook. From the idea of catastrophic or romantic revolution it moves on to that of protracted or continuous revolution, asking if not that we die for the Revolution as of old, that we learn to live for it. And in such revolution the Trade Unions, which have always rejected any other kind, are taking the lead, if our assumption regarding the motive and continuity of Trade Unionism is correct.

That is the way of revolution to-day. What is the goal?—not the goal of a personal desire or idealism, but the point toward which there is movement.

Economic Democracy has been borrowed as a temporary name of the goal, a name none the worse for having more than one interpretation, which in any case must not be too precise, so as to imply, for instance, any method more specific than Trade Unionism. Certain qualities and conditions of this Economic Democracy can be specified. They include two essential qualities—freedom and peace; and two necessary material conditions—participation by the workers in the management and control of industry, and an equitable distribution of wealth.

Peace and freedom. The words come readily to our lips; the ideas seldom occupy our minds. We are inclined to think about freedom and peace only when we have lost or feel we are in danger of losing them, and therefore think of them rather crudely, as if they were things in themselves. We are disposed to think that freedom can be conferred, for instance, and that peace can be established, as we confer the freedom of a city and establish peace in a noisy classroom. Hence our respect for an aldermanic State and a monitory League of Nations. At the same time, quite incongruously, many of us think of freedom and peace as natural things, being at heart Liberals; and in the confusion we grasp at absolutes.

The working man, outside our intellectual confusion, is not interested in absolutes. He is not interested in

absolute freedom ; he seeks freedom in association with others, and finds it in the discipline and service of his Union. We cannot make freedom. Freedom is not a thing in itself—it is a quality of things, a quality of its own limiting circumstances.

The worker does not imagine that absolute peace has been established by the latest collective agreement, but enjoys peace according to the justice of that agreement. War is a series of events ; but peace is not an event—it is a quality of events. We cannot make peace ; we can only make agreements from which peace may ensue.

The two material conditions we have called necessary, and find necessary also for these predicated qualities, are joint control of industry and an equitable distribution of wealth. The former is a declared aim of Trade Unionism, and progress toward it is evident. It is a matter of daily observation that the Trade Unions are moving in that direction. Their advanced position in the building trades has been noted. Since 1926 industrialists more and more find it desirable to take Trade Union leaders into their confidence in the reconstruction which the political and economic changes in the world are forcing upon them. Faced by new difficulties at home and abroad, industry is coming to depend upon collaboration in all its planning, upon the good will of a common understanding of the whole prospect. The fate of the cotton trade has been balancing on this point for months, and the future of agriculture, it has been suggested, may depend upon nationalising not so much the land as the spirit and practice of collaboration found on every farm.

The public interest also requires that control of industry shall be on a broader basis. The planning of industry is inevitably producing more monopolistic combinations and a greater centralisation of finance. If the rule of plutocracy is not to be strengthened and perpetuated by these greater facilities for it, Trade Union partnership is indispensable. No body of consumers is more sensitive to prices, to variations in the cost of living. No body is more alive to the abuses of mono-

polistic profiteering, or less likely to take part in it. The Trade Unions had enough of profit-sharing in their disastrous experience with sliding scales years ago. Labour no longer regards itself as a commodity, as raw material, as a mere item in the profit-process. The Trade Unions are not coming into partnership on that basis, or by a simple extension of shareholding. They have more to claim and more to contribute than that would indicate. Their partnership brings with it the demand and the opportunity not only to make the best of Capitalism, but to make something better of it.

Class collaboration does not mean identity of interests or singleness of mind. The conflict of interests goes on. If competition is the life of trade, class contest is the life of society. But being less easily dramatised than the old encounters, the present process of the conflict, continuous and revolutionary though it be, has not yet touched the imagination of the rank and file. Collaboration is generally accepted; but, as the official policy of Trade Unionism to-day, any kind of collaboration is open to the easy misrepresentation of romantics who still promise everything "in a day," for whom any other promise would seem to be defeatism.

Clarification of Trade Union policy will come. And even more than this, co-ordination of policy is needed. Labour leaders who have to speak for Party votes as well as for their Unions are under the special difficulty of reconciling industrial collaboration with parliamentary defiance. Until reconciliation of the political and economic policies of Labour takes place in fact, there will be hedging on both subjects.

Co-ordination of Labour policy is, moreover, necessary for securing our second material requirement, an equitable distribution of wealth, since it calls for political as well as industrial action. The particular test of the new parliamentary democracy is whether it can succeed, where the old party system conspicuously failed, in making possible such a redistribution. The Trade Unions deal with income at its source, but the incidence of taxation to-day

can frustrate any attempt to divide the proceeds of industry more fairly. So inequitable is the present incidence, that the percentage of income paid in direct and indirect taxation by a worker earning two or three pounds a week is double that paid by the man in the office earning five or six hundred pounds a year.

The Social Services are often represented as affording adjustment of fortune as between rich and poor. They may be made to do so. But here again the incidence of taxation can be and is, in fact, fatal to any such representation. "The cost of the Social Services is little, if any greater than the increased taxation imposed on the poor in the last twenty years." Writing in 1935, the very eminent group of authors of *The Next Five Years*, without intentional commentary on the influence of the Labour Party in Parliament since the War, enlarge upon that statement: "There has been no net gain to the wage-earning class from the Budget changes of the last two decades . . . it is roughly fair to regard the richer classes as providing about as much as the extra revenue required for the payment of interest on war loans, and the poorer classes as much as to pay for the extension of the Social Services." The partnership of the Trade Unions is needed in the State as well as in industry.

And now, having borrowed Economic Democracy as a name for the goal, let us put it back on the shelf where we found it alongside Anarchism, Syndicalism, Socialism, Communism and all the other great volumes of Social Idealism. Perhaps a new volume is in preparation with a good English name. But since the days of Owen none has been published, only the Guildist supplement. Our national authorship has been the living Co-operation and Trade Unionism which he inspired.

Yet out of the long gestation of Trade Unionism, after a hundred years of refraining from any ideation of its own, and unbroken caution regarding that of others, will an idea emerge, the idealisation or at least the naming of some goal? Possibly not. Possibly it has already emerged. Possibly the ideal is in the practice and Trade

Unionism itself the English version and name of continuous revolution.

In its adolescence Trade Unionism finished with utopianism, and has since rejected every form of it. Some ascribe this to mere stolidity, or to a national dislike of theory. Perhaps it is more than this, and more than written wisdom. For simple people the way to better living is better living. For them, as for the Old Philosopher, the Way and the Goal are one.

